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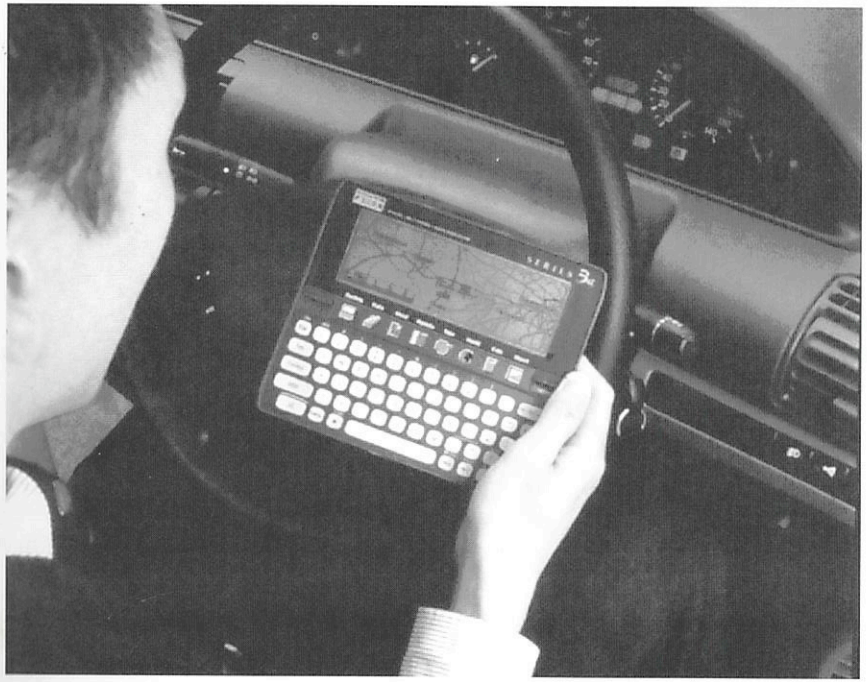
Palmtop

The journal for Psion Series 3 and 3a users

Issue 5, Volume 1 Bimonthly



News, reviews, gossip, feature articles, programming, letters, hints & tips, tutorials and more...

...72 pages of up-to-date information on your favourite PALMTOP computer!

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Palmtop
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Thanks...

Special thanks for this issue go to Chris Love at Clove Technology and Richard Mountford at Systemslink Two Ltd for supplying the various Psion cases for review.

Thanks also to all the contributors whose names appear within the magazine, particularly Andrew Baldwin for his regular programming articles and Pete Sipple without whom Palmtop probably would not exist. Also not forgetting my girlfriend, Rosemary, for so diligently proofreading the entire content of the magazine.

Address

All requests for subscriptions or back issues and any comments or criticisms regarding the content of *PALMTOP* should be directed to the editor at the following address:

Steve Clack
25 Avocet Way
Bicester
Oxon OX6 0YN
ENGLAND

alternatively, telephone or fax on +44 (0)1869 249287
or: e-mail sclack@cix.compulink.co.uk
or: 100602.3723@compuserve.com

Submissions

Any contributions of material published within the pages of *PALMTOP* (excluding 'On The Net') will earn the author one free issue added to their subscription. If you wish to write feature articles for the magazine then please contact the editor to discuss your ideas. Any articles over 1000 words in length will earn one year's extension to the author's subscription, or a minimum payment of £30 (or foreign equivalent).

Back Issues

Back issues of *PALMTOP* are always available at one sixth of the annual subscription price per issue. Just send payment in the usual way, stating which issues you require.

Subscriptions

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General

PALMTOP acknowledges that some of the names referred to within the magazine are registered trademarks.

Editorial

Psion have clearly hit upon a winner with the Series 3, and particularly the 3a range of machines. The unfortunate failure of the MC range of laptop computers around 1990 is the only major commercial blunder Psion has made.

The technical demands on a company such as Psion are colossal. Even the record breaking success of the 3a machines gives the company no opportunity to rest on its laurels for even a moment. A computer that is way ahead of the competition one year can easily become an obsolete lump of metal and plastic the next. With the possible exception of the Hewlett Packard HP200LX I have firmly believed the Psion 3a to be the only machine for serious palmtop users since its inception a little over 3 years ago.

With this in mind I was interested to read about the new Hewlett Packard *OmniGo 100* recently. At first glance similar to the Psion-lookalike HP200LX, the OmniGo offers a conventional keyboard just like the 3a, but cleverly combines it with a stylus to enable pen input directly via the touch-sensitive LCD screen. The screen even folds back through 180° to allow pen input with the case in a closed position, similar to the pen-only Apple Newton.

Another important development in the world of handheld computers is the release of version 2.0 of the *Apple Newton* operating system just a few weeks ago. The pen-based Newton had previously received a lot of bad press for its poor handwriting recognition, but the new OS claims to have improved this greatly, together with a number of speed and functionality improvements in the system software: such as the ability to use the screen in 'landscape' rather than just 'portrait' mode. Apple also supply an optional compact keyboard for times where the necessary space is available and faster text input is required.

I saw Newton 2.0 demonstrated at an exhibition in London recently and was impressed by the apparent improvements. This led me to thinking of what the successor to the 3a might be like, and of when we are likely to see its appearance. Psion have a (commercially wise) reputation for keeping new developments close to their chests until the very last moment, so I don't expect much accurate information before the release date. No matter what though, I think we can expect such a machine to have some interesting innovations that will hopefully keep Psion at the top of the palmtop heap for another year or so.

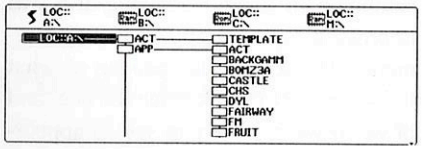
Steve Clack - Editor

Palmtop News

The latest hot gossip on what's happening in the Psion world

Purple File Manager

Purple Software have just released the latest version of their excellent File Manager software as a stand-alone package. It was recently introduced as part of their *ToolKit 1* suite, which includes separate units conversion, picture viewer and graphics printing programs. File Manager by itself is available on SSD at £34.95 including VAT, £15 less than the full ToolKit.



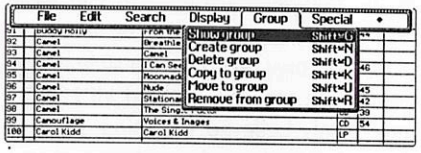
Purple's File Manager

New version of DataView

Purple Software have been exceptionally busy in recent months, and have released *DataView Pro*, a 'big brother' version of their *DataView* database software. Reviewed elsewhere in this issue, DataView Pro retails at £69.95 on SSD, or £59.95 on PC floppy disk incl. VAT.

File Manager and DataView Pro are available from major Psion dealers and selected retail outlets, or contact Purple Software direct:

Phone: +44 (0)171 388 3111
Fax: +44 (0)171 387 1188
E-mail: 100526.3715@compuserve.com



DataView Pro

Psion reference guide

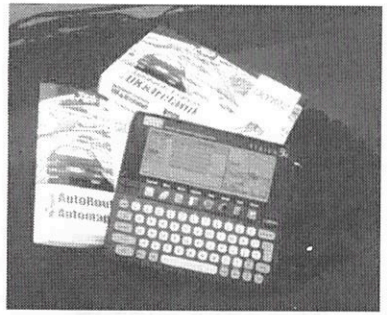
Widget Software have released an A5 sized, ring-bound 'Quick Reference Guide' for Series 3a users. The Quick Reference Guide is available direct from Widget Software at £24.95 including VAT. A full review of this product will appear in the next issue of *Palmtop*.

Available direct from Widget Software:

Phone: +44 (0)1438 815444
Fax: +44 (0)1438 815222

Autoroute released

Microsoft's Autoroute Express for the Series 3a, as reviewed in issue 4 of *Palmtop*, is now widely available. Covering the UK and Ireland, *Autoroute Express* retails for £69.95 including VAT on ROM SSD. A sister product, 'Automap Road Atlas' is available in the USA. This covers 420,000 miles of roads in 6,000 locations including interstates, state highways, airports and ferries.

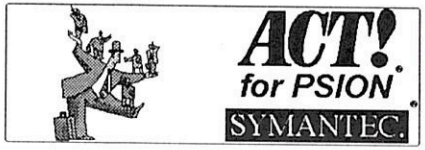


SMS Link *still* imminent...

The Nokia SMS Link package is still due for 'imminent release'. Originally slated for shipping some months ago, the link should (hopefully) be available by the time you read this. A full review is planned for issue 6 of *Palmtop*.

ACT! available on disk

Symantec's popular *ACT!* contact management software has been released for the Series 3a on 3.5 inch PC floppy disk at £89.95 plus VAT. An SSD version is due in January, probably at £99.95. ACT! is reviewed elsewhere in this issue.



Symantec's new ACT!

Psion User - Winter 1995

The second issue of Psion's own *Psion User* magazine has been distributed to more than 100,000 customers. The 26 page glossy booklet has a number of case histories of corporate Psion customers around the world, together with some recent product reviews and news items. This issue even gives a brief mention to *Palmtop*, referring to it as 'a useful Psion-only magazine, yet to make it to the [Worldwide] Web...'

On the subject of the *World Wide Web*, it is *not* intended that the contents of *Palmtop* will ever become available on the WWW. A home page is in the process of being set up, but this is intended purely as any easy means for prospective subscribers to get more information about the magazine. Don't worry if you don't have web access—you're not missing out on any of the contents of *Palmtop*!

New Software & Accessories Catalogue

A new version of Psion's *Software and Accessories* catalogue has now been released. This attractively-produced 64 page A5 booklet is packed with details of more than 100 items of software and

accessories for the Series 3 and 3a machines. This useful resource is a must for anyone in the market for software and accessories for their machine. Contact Psion directly for details of how to obtain a copy.

Psnippets...

Originally from:

s-3401@ iglou2.iglou.com
(John Sanders)

"I typed a cookbook exclusively on my 3a. With laptop keystrokes getting so short and the keyboards getting smaller, I find the 3a keyboard getting easier to use.

The *Fat-Free Real Food Cookbook* was also printed using the printer drivers in the 3a as well as from the *3Fax* program. The nutrition labels were made with the *Drawit* program. All nutrition calculations were made with the *Compute A Diet* program.

I guess I got obsessed with proving the an entire book could be done on a psion exclusively."

J. Kevin Wolfe

This little gem was plucked off the Internet by Neil Brewitt. It just goes to show what you can *really* do with your Psion! - Ed.

PicView

Purple Software's PicView software as reviewed in issue 4 *can* be used to convert between PIC, BMP, PCX and GIF formats, simply by choosing 'Save As' under the 'File' menu.

My apologies to Purple Software for overlooking this useful feature - Ed.

Apology

Again I must apologise to those who have written to *Palmtop* but have not yet received a reply. I will try to respond to everyone as soon as I am able.

In the meantime I am always happy to answer questions by telephone during evenings from around 7-9pm, or during the daytime at weekends - Ed.

Shareware Shorts

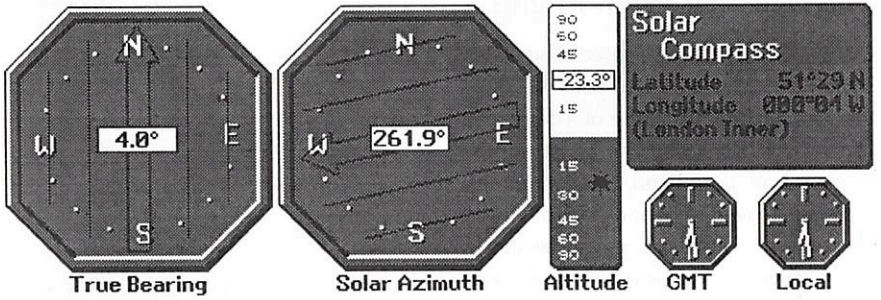
New shareware for the Series 3 and 3a is being released daily. As a new regular feature to *Palmtop*, Pete Sipple updates us on some of the newest additions to the already vast collection of low cost software - 'Shareware Shorts' . . .

Who goes there?

Watchdog, a new application from America, bills itself as a home security program. By making combined use of the Series 3a microphone and speaker, Watchdog 'listens' for ambient noises (i.e. an intruder), and plays a WVE file, such as a dog bark or police siren when the volume exceeds a preset threshold. Another possible use is as a child minder: when baby wakes up, Watchdog can play a lullaby or some reassuring words from mummy. Very cleverly done—but beware, a mains adaptor is advised if you don't want to drain your batteries. Registration cost is $25.

Where in the world?

Solar Compass is a neat little program that will enable your Series 3a to find its way home. The principle of a solar compass is not a new one, but its implementation on a Psion shows once again that a skillful programmer can create something both useful and impressive. The left hand dial shows the bearing of your target destination, with the right hand one being the bearing of the sun



Solar Compass—now where am I?

relative to True North. As a solar compass works in GMT (Greenwich Mean Time), Compass makes a very clever call to the WORLD application to ascertain time, location and offset from GMT. All in all, a great program... as long as the sun's out!

Save our Screens

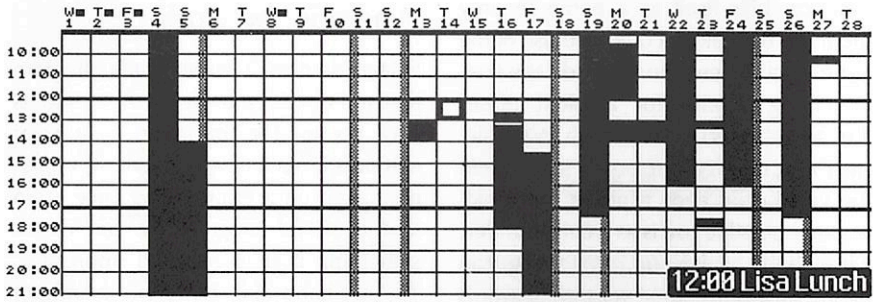
Just about anyone with a desktop computer will have, at some time, tinkered with a screen saver to blank the screen during periods of keyboard inactivity. Now the Psion can have one too, in the form of some bouncing blocks. A totally irrelevant gimmick, available for your Psion now. Look for SCRSAVE.OPA.

removes the rather annoying restrictions placed on the trial version.

PicPoc V2.5 for Series 3a

The latest version of this graphics program now handles 1 and 2 plane PIC bitmaps up to 640x400 pixels. Five 'colours' (black, white and three greys) can be dealt with in the current version, and PCX / GIF conversion is now supported.

New shareware can be obtained on disk from 3-lib, or for those with access to a modem, from on-line services such as CIX and CompuServe.



The view that Psion forgot?

JAMV4.ZIP has been released. The above screen can now be tied to your AGENDA file. If you make heavy use of a diary then this is worth a look. The latest version displays both timed and untimed entries, highlights overlaps, and claims faster processing. Up to 56 days can be shown simultaneously, and text search is available. Registration cost is £12.50, which

Shareware ??

Many of our readers may be unfamiliar with how to obtain the enormous amount of shareware and free software available for the Psion Series 3 and 3a machines.

Apart from downloading the software from electronic bulletin boards and online services such a CompuServe and CiX, perhaps the most exhaustive catalogue of software is held by Steve Litchfield's '3-Lib':

3-Lib offers either a collection of a couple of hundred of the very best shareware programs as a standard set on floppy disk, or selected files from the entire 3-Lib archives (currently around 1000 programs) on floppy disk or Flash SSD.

If you would like more information on 3-Lib then please contact Steve Litchfield directly at the following address (note that Steve has recently moved):

3-Lib
22 Grays Crescent
Woodley
Berkshire RG5 3EN
ENGLAND

Tel: +44 (0)1734 265081

E-mail:
slitchfield@cix.compulink.co.uk

or send a Stamped and self-address envelope for more details.

Programming

Do you have any burning questions on the subject of programming in need of answering?

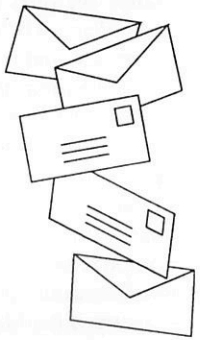
Starting from the very next issue, *Palmtop* will feature a 'programmer's question page' (or even *two* pages) just for you!

Please send in your questions to the usual address, and we will endeavour to set you straight.

Also, if you can think of a suitably creative title for such a regular feature then please send in your idea. If your title is used then you will receive two free issues added to your subscription.

Readers' Letters

The best letter submitted for issue 6 will receive a FREE Leather Sleeve Case for their Psion, as reviewed in this issue!



PRIZE LETTER - Matt Millar wins a FREE copy of Kuma's "100 Most Frequently Asked Questions..." book for his interesting angle on the SSD price debate below...

We could almost have filled this issue with comments about the cost of Psion SSDs and other peripherals after Paul Lippi's letter in the last issue...

For and against SSD prices...

Dear Palmtop

Concerning the price of Solid State Disks for Psion computers I'm afraid it's a question of supply and demand. Let's have a think about the production of SSDs:

1 Our main product is Organisers, hence we must manufacture these as cheaply as possible—anything else comes second (who wants peripherals if they don't have the Organiser?)

2 Some people will want more storage: what proportion? Maybe 1 in 3 users? We have to offer a range of storage sizes, from 256K to 4Mb Flash, and 128K to 1Mb RAM.

The costs to set up the production machines are large (the modern Flash disks are all surface mount) but we can produce all of the flash disks on the same production line, so we get some savings.

Flash chips are expensive—especially as we don't buy in the same bulk as we do the 3a components.

For the sake of argument (this figure is completely off the top of my head) a Flash disk production line costs £500,000. We sell one flash disk for every three 3a's sold: this year we have sold 163,500 3a's (recent industry stats, 32.7% of the PDA market) so that's a £10 premium on each SSD sold. Now there are all the extra costs of switching production type between Flash sizes, and lost production time (and faulty goods at the start of a production run) so we have extra running costs.

Compare this with SIMM memory chips for the average PC: lets assume that Flash chips are about twice the price of SIMMS for raw chips, in bulk (I would guess they are more than this). Manufacturers retail price will be 50% of RRP.

So, manufacturing retail for 1 x 4Mb SIMM, similar complexity production line (£500,000, note I'm talking SIMM assembly with surface mount chips, not Silicon fabrication) is going to be about £60. Let's say that the costs of distribution etc. are similar to SSDs (but of course we sell 100 times more), so the fixed costs are about 10p per item, effectively zero.

Now, we MUST cover these costs, else I'll get sacked as production manager, so I'm going to set my Recommended Retail Price at a 100% mark up to cover all those distribution costs and to make money to cover all that Research and Development expenditure. So the £10 extra has become £20 on the MRRP, which becomes £40 on the RRP - the High Street shops want their 50% mark-up:

So predicted RRP of a 2Mb SSD is:

4Mb SIMM	£120
Extra fixed costs	£ 40
TOTAL RETAIL PRICE	**£160**

(VAT was ignored throughout)

OK, so this is completely off the top of my head, but it's the rough reason that SSDs are more expensive than the equivalent in the PC world—it's not a justification, it's real life! Don't forget that SSDs have come down in price once (my first 512K SSD cost the same as a 1Mb SSD now). The more people that buy the machines the more the £10 mentioned above comes down, and every £1 saved there is £4 off the RRP.

In conclusion, I don't think that Psion are 'fleecing' their customers with SSD prices (*3Link* prices maybe, that should be £30) just applying sound business sense to a rather thorny problem. Their solution to these complaints—the 1Mb and 2Mb 3a's, that's where they really screw the costs to the ground, and can offer us better value for money.

P.S. I don't work for Psion, and I'm not connected with them in any way: it's just that I have a sympathy for manufacturers. I personally think that Psion do astoundingly well when you look at what you get for the £300 or so for a Series 3a.

Matt Millar
Leeds, West Yorkshire

Expensive Psion stuff

Dear Palmtop

I thought I'd write concerning Paul Lippi's letter in issue 4 about the cost of Psion peripherals.

Whilst I happen to think that our little 3a is the most wonderful and useful computing device ever invented, I'm afraid I'm in agreement regarding the cost

of all the extras. How on earth can Psion justify £200+ for a 2Mb flash SSD, whatever the format of that 2Mb? £130+ for HALF A MEGABYTE OF RAM???!!! (I can get twice the RAM for £100 less for a PC!) I've got both of these. For the combined cost of these plus the 3a I could have bought myself a portable PC.

And the Psion *3Fax*. I know it's tiny and gorgeous, but £200 for a 2400 bps modem (albeit with 9600 bps send only fax)?

I'm afraid that despite how great my machine is, there's no way I can justify these prices when I show it to colleagues. I guess the introduction of the 2Mb 3a has perhaps negated the cost of RAM, but for us poor souls with original 256K or 512K machines this is little comfort.

Does Psion have any comments regarding their pricing? It seems to me that it's the only flaw in the whole concept of the 3a system.

I would also agree with Mr Lippi concerning backup times. 2 hours or so to backup a 2Mb Flash SSD is just too long, therefore making it more of a hassle and therefore less likely for the user to do: consequently making it more likely that it'll go wrong when you haven't backed it up!

Come on Psion, give us PCMCIA. Can you imagine an 80Mb hard drive tucked into your 3a? WOW!

Mark Avey
Cheltenham, Gloucestershire

The Great SSD Scam

Dear Palmtop

In response to your question 'Do you think the price of SSDs is reasonable and fair ... ?'

I am a newcomer to Psions, having only recently bought a 1mb 3a. I also bought PsiWin, a mains adaptor, a 512K Flash SSD and the shareware collection from Steve Litchfield's 3-Lib. Later, for a bit of fun, I bought Psion's *Games 3a*, and mistakenly thought that if I didn't like the games, I could always reuse the SSD for my own stuff.

Of course, I soon discovered that Games 3a is write protected—rather a shame because my 1Mb 3a already has the *Patience* game built in, and with a bit of effort I could have used the space for something else. It also set me thinking. A 512K SSD with software on it costs around £40 while a blank one costs around £90, and Autoroute on a 1Mb SSD will cost around £70 while a blank one costs around £120. Are we being conned or what? What should a blank SSD really cost?

David P Maw
Crowthorne, Berkshire

All is not quite as it seems, David. All of the SSDs to which you are referring are not conventional FLASH or RAM SSDs, but ROM SSDs. In simple terms this means that the software in question is 'burnt into' the chip during manufacture, and so cannot be erased by any means. This type of ROM (Read Only Memory) chip is relatively cheap to produce in large quantities (perhaps tens of thousands), which accounts for the enormous price discrepancy you have seen. Having said all this, I firmly believe that SSDs *are* too expensive, and the more pressure we users can bring to bear on Psion then the sooner prices will start to fall to a more acceptable level - Ed.

More than an Organiser...

Dear Palmtop

As with most people my Psion is my alarm clock, my diary, my notepad and my calculator. But for me, it is also often my voice, my travelling companion and my independence. While most Psion users have a choice about using their Psion in preference to a conventional diary or filofax, I do not!

The reason is that while I am a writer, I am unable to write. While I am a good communicator, I have slurred speech. In the past I would have to rely on assistance of the human kind. As someone with Cerebral Palsy, dependence on other people can lead to low expectations of ability as the control of my life is removed. My Psion has allowed me to be independent, to travel around Britain and the world on my own and to live life to the full.

My Psion is not specially adapted, but simply your common High Street model. It doesn't take over my own voice, but merely acts as an assistant when people are not getting what I am saying or when, like in a taxi, I need to give an exact and often prepared answer. Its home is by my phone where it becomes my notepad for writing messages and arranging meetings, similar to any notepad by any phone, except I can't doodle on it!

I chose my Psion because it was light, powerful and easy to use. When I go out I keep it in a bag around my neck so I can quickly get it out and start writing things down. It does what I need, but like all things it's not perfect. I find the keyboard slightly difficult to use and extremely slow, so I tend to write notes rather than long essays! The best thing about the Psion is that it is almost unbreakable!

I did have a old Acorn Pocketbook. The hinge broke off and I had to use the computer in two halves with just a wire connecting the screen to the keyboard. While it was no longer as portable as before the computer still functioned as well as ever. I have often dropped my Psion, only to find that it didn't notice the fall, but I am always dreading the time it does notice—ouch!

My Psion is my life: without it I would not be where I am today. It is not a coincidence that the Information Technology revolution happened at the same time as the revolution for people like myself.

Simon Stephens
Coventry, Warwickshire

A Closer Look...

...at some of the newest and most interesting products available for your Series 3/3a

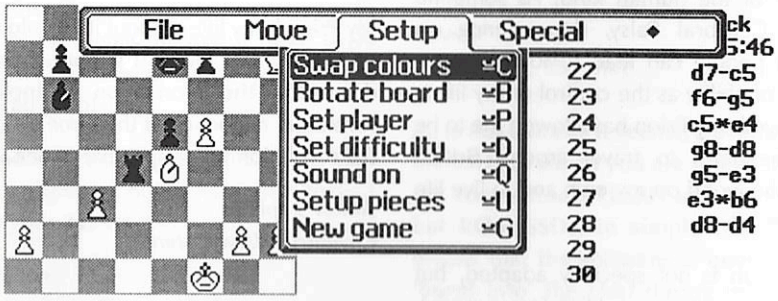
3a Chess

At last someone has written a version of Chess for the 3a. Psion long since released a chess game for the original Series 3 'Classic', and this runs just fine on the 3a, thought the clunky graphics resolution makes it unattractive to look at. Purple Software have come to the rescue of 3a-owning chess aficionados with a miniature marvel which occupies less than 120K of disk space, yet plays at any level from novice to master, and even includes 25 master games selected by Malcolm Pein, International Master and Chess Correspondent to the Daily Telegraph.

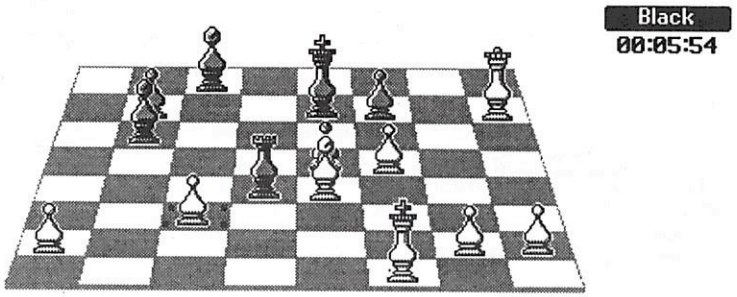
You can toggle the neat display between 2 and 3 dimensional views using the diamond key. Play against a friend or against the machine, or get the machine to play a demonstration game against itself.

Understandably, 3a Chess needs a fair amount of memory: 98K of free RAM at rest, as opposed to Psion's memory-lean AGENDA at 28K (or the Psion Calculator at 5K!)

By default you play white, but 'Psion-C' will swap colours, and 'Psion-B' rotates the board to bring black to the fore. As you play each move is noted, together with the playing times. Chess takes a comfortingly long time thinking over its



2D mode. Easy to read, but a little plain



3D mode. Very attractive, but can be a little confusing to read with a full board

moves even at novice level, and since it beeps when it's moved, you can multi-task (look up the time in Adelaide, check your to-dos) in the meantime. You can ask it for hints about your next move, which is a good way to learn about the game, and if you don't like the way things are going you can 'Take back' your last move. If the phone rings, you can pause the game till you are free to resume.

Moving the chess pieces is easy: use the cursor arrows to highlight your piece, then Tab, Enter or Space to pick it up, cursor keys again to move to the new location, and finally Tab, Enter or Space to put the piece down. If you think your game is good enough to record for posterity, just 'Bring' your list of game moves to the WORD application, edit it and e-mail it to the world.

Poppy Holden

InfoBOX

3a Chess is available directly from Purple Software or from major Psion dealers at £39.95 on SSD, or £34.95 on PC floppy disk. You can even upgrade from Psion's original Series 3 Chess for £29.95. Contact Purple software for further details. It will not run on the Series 3 'Classic' machines.

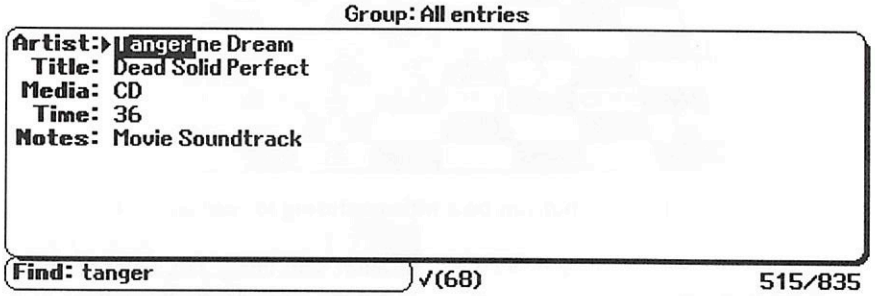
See page 4 for contact details for Purple Software.

DataView Pro

Purple Software's first foray into database engines, DataView, was something of a mixed bag. It coupled a number of good features that went far beyond Psion's own basic DATA application built into all 3a's together with a number of disappointments. Sorting was quite slow on large files, it had no 'search and replace' function, no ability to jump to a specific numbered record, and a few parts of the user interface were annoyingly inconsistent with the Psion standard.

The new 'DataView Pro' is obviously a bid to address these shortcomings and to add some additional functionality at the same time. As with almost all the

enhanced database programs available DataView Pro couples the standard DATA-like 'card' view with a spreadsheet-like 'list' view which shows several records on screen together. Both views are zoomable, and Purple Software have really done a lot of work to make the presentation of information at attractive as possible.



'Card' view, looking much like Psion's own DATA program

The card view has been re-worked to make it look more like the standard DATA application, the diamond key now toggles between this and list view, and records can now be edited in card view just like in DATA. This is a big improvement on the original DataView, which had a confusing implementation of its card view.

The list view is impressively configurable, allowing the file-by-file setup of zoom size, the use of gridlines between rows and columns (including their individual thicknesses), and the option of whether titles and record numbers are shown on screen. The zooming of text on screen is now done using the conventional 'Psion-Z' shortcut in preference to Purple's previous technique of using their own quirky dialog box arrangement. I'm a firm believer that all software developers should go to considerable lengths to make their applications conform to the standard keystroke patterns we are all familiar with, and Purple Software are to be credited for finally falling into line in this area.

Group: All entries

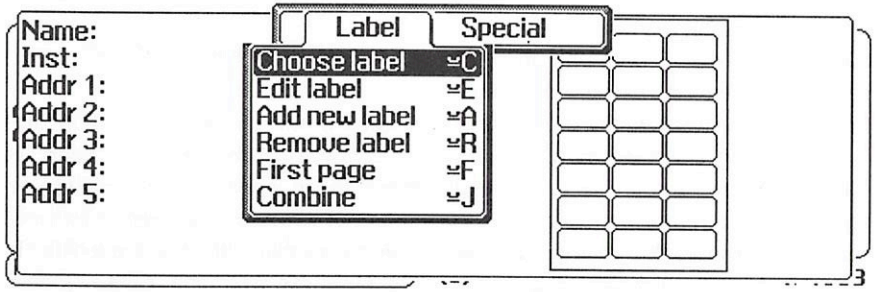
		Artist:	Title:	Media:	Time:	Notes:
515	✓	Tangerine Dream	Dead Solid Perfect	CD	36	Movie Soundtrack
516	✓	Tangerine Dream	Destination Berlin	CD	38	
517	✓	Tangerine Dream	Dream Sequence (1)	CD	65	Greatest Hits - 2 disc set
518	✓	Tangerine Dream	Dream Sequence (2)	CD	68	Greatest Hits - 2 disc set
519	✓	Tangerine Dream	Encore	CD	71	live
520	✓	Tangerine Dream	Exit	CD	37	
521	✓	Tangerine Dream	Firestarter	CD	43	Movie Soundtrack
522	✓	Tangerine Dream	Flashpoint	LP		Movie Soundtrack
523	✓	Tangerine Dream	Force Majeure	CD	40	
524	✓	Tangerine Dream	Green Desert	CD	39	

'List' view. beautifully configurable from within DataView Pro

DataView Pro now boasts a useful 'search and replace' function, just like the one in WORD. This allows you to change all occurrences of 'John Smith' to 'John and Jane Smith', and is also handy for stripping any excess characters that can appear when you import a database from an external computer. A very worthwhile addition.

Speed is always important for anyone using large data files, and searching is now more than twice as fast, with DataView Pro taking less than 15 seconds to find a string from the last record in a 2000 record/200Kb database file, as opposed to more than 30 seconds with the original DataView. With extremely large files (around 6000 records) 'Pro' is more than 20 times faster than its predecessor. Unfortunately this extra searching speed has its price, and files generally take 50% to 100% longer to open than with DataView.

Other aspect of file manipulation have been improved too, and the program now performs successful sorts on large files where DataView previously fell over, though the sort itself can take several minutes for a very large file, particularly if you choose to sort on more than one field (up to three can be chosen).



Creating labels from your database—a real snap with Dataview Pro

As with its predecessor, 'Pro' offers really excellent label printing and mail-merging facilities, and will interface directly with the Psion word processor to create standard 'form' letters. These features alone might make DV Pro a 'must have' program for some users.

Other smaller improvements include the ability to jump to any record number in your database: for instance you can go straight to record number 157. The program also supports 'Short Messaging System' messaging for those with a GSM phone and Psion's new SMS link cable and software, and DataView Pro will

support data input from a '3-Wand' barcode wand.

Two search modes are now supported in list view, with the option of a full-blown multi-criteria search (so you can find all John Smiths who live in London and who's telephone number contains '123'), or you can use a simple 'match as you type' method that searches a selected field for a text string as you enter it. The latter is limited in that it will only search at the beginning of a string, but is a useful addition nevertheless. The searching itself is no faster in this mode, but it saves invoking the dialog box with multiple search options. Alternatively, searching from card view works in the same way as with the Psion DATA program. Another handy feature is the ability to set field types as text, currency, date, time, etc. in order to ensure that sorting always provides the correct results. This means that you can now enter '£12.34' and the program will successfully sort this in ascending order before '£102.34' instead of after it (as would happen if it were treating the string as merely text).

All of the above enhancements add up to a major improvement over the original DataView software. Apart from the 'could do better' searching speed within large files, I have only two real gripes about this product. The first (somewhat minor) concerns the sparse on-line help provided with the program. Pressing the 'Help' key next to your spacebar brings up a menu with only two or three screenfuls of very basic assistance. It really seems that Purple Software were in a rush to get the product to market, and no-one took the time or trouble to finish off the help system. Sadly, their new 3a Chess program also suffers the same lack of effort here, and it's a shame that such generally polished products should suffer from this relatively small but annoying oversight.

Setting up a mail merge

Secondly, and almost unbelievably, this otherwise excellent product is badly let down by an inability to instantly view a subset of selected data when in list view. This means that when you are looking in list view for everyone called 'Jones', DataView Pro does not immediately show all of the selected records, but keeps the database in its original order and simply highlights the first record containing 'Jones'. In contrast, most database programs will immediately show a filtered list containing all of the records containing 'Jones', and will exclude all of the unwanted records. The only way to view your subset of records together is to create a new 'group' and then move the selected records into that group. This 'grouping' feature in itself can be immensely useful for creating supplementary data files, but is a dismally slow way of viewing a set of selected records. The importance of this missing feature will vary according to the way you work with your data, but for my own use it makes the product virtually useless. I was so amazed at the lack of this feature that I spent some time scouring the manual in an attempt to find how it is done. Alas I found nothing.

It is worth pointing out that if your data manipulation requirements are modest and your files not terribly large (perhaps a few hundred names and addresses) then most of the performance criticisms discussed here will not cause you any troubles. If you want to print out labels from your database, send mass mailings from your 3a, need SMS access from a GSM mobile phone or need to read barcodes into your databases then DataView Pro is probably the best package to buy. It is a huge improvement on its predecessor in terms of both features and speed, and for the extra £10 cost I can see no instances where the original DataView would be a better buy than 'Pro'. If Purple Software were to address the problem mentioned above then this software would get a very strong recommendation.

What if you don't need any of the specialised features mentioned above and simply want something more flexible and powerful than the built-in DATA application? In such cases I would still recommend the superb freeware JBDATA as the best buy, if you can call free software a 'best buy'. JBDATA offers a similarly flexible table view to DataView Pro, an excellent search and replace facility, much faster searching of large files, and the ability to quickly list a found subset of records without going to the trouble of creating a new group and exporting it first. The final icing on the JBDATA cake is that it costs nothing, compared with at least £60 for a copy of 'Pro'.

The problem with shareware and freeware is that perhaps 90% of Psion owners don't even know that it exists. Regardless of relative merits, DataView Pro will probably reach far more users than the likes of JBDATA, because it's the only one they will see on the shelves of their local computer shop. In a righteous world some visionary software company would employ the author of JBDATA, John Boyce, and then make lots of money making a truly excellent product available to the masses.

Steve Clack

Note: The original DataView software was featured in an in-depth article in issue 2 of *Palmtop*, together with rival packages, JBDATA and Data DeLuxe.

InfoBOX

DataView Pro is available directly from Purple Software or from major Psion dealers at £69.95 on SSD, or £59.95 on PC floppy disk. DataView owners can upgrade to 'Pro' for £39.95. Contact Purple software for further details. It occupies just over 100K of storage space, and will not run on the Series 3 'Classic' machines.

See page 4 for contact details for Purple Software.

Mobile Pages

Mobile Software have developed 'Mobile Pages', a new relational database engine which will convert a PC text-based database to Psion 3a format, allowing complex, fast searches to be performed on large amounts of data. This idea has many possibilities: so far Mobile Software has worked with Expotel and Transmedia, who are offering their databases to Psion users at low cost (£3.50 for Expotel, from Widget Software, and no charge at all for the Transmedia database, obtainable direct from Transmedia Europe).

Selecting the type of hotel you want...

On my desk is a huge, heavy, glossy brochure from Expotel listing thousands of hotels: just the kind of thing you want to lug around when travelling—not! The same thing (UK and International hotel details, plus the database software) fits into 300Kb on your pocket Psion and is far easier to search. If you choose an Expotel hotel, you can order your room with an 0345 (local call charge) number and mention Expotel to get a large discount. I chose at random the Adelaide Hilton and was quoted $155 instead of the standard price of $230 for a single room.

The system is quite powerful and fast once you have mastered its subtleties, and you can save your selections to a notepad before making your final choice of a bed for the night. Transmedia, accessed via the same Mobile Pages software, offers a 25% discount on meals and drinks at thousands of restaurants in the UK and Australia (with the USA coming next year) for an annual fee of £35. I haven't seen the software version yet, but for London the paper handbook contains the Gay Hussar, the White Tower, the British Museum Restaurant, Simpsons and many other respectable names.

The software comes either on a floppy disk or by e-mail. Installing from a PC is easiest using either RCOM or MCLINK, as once you have copied over the neat 5K installer utility it will fetch whichever database you choose from your PC, and if you need to reclaim the space it will uninstall it neatly for you. Using PsiWin is more of a performance as you have to select the cryptically named files by hand. To keep up-to-date you'll have to repeat the exercise every 6 weeks or so.

A couple of drawbacks with this first release: firstly, it is not very intuitive to use, and secondly, since Mobile Pages can access several databases in much the same way as Word accesses many files, it would be more standard to have it list them under its icon on the system screen instead of requiring the user to tab around a database selector once the software is fired up—maybe in the next release this will be addressed.

Poppy Holden

InfoBOX

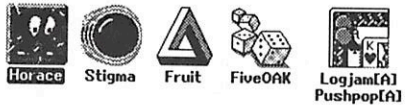
Contact Mobile Software directly for more details of current products using their database software:

Mobile Software Ltd
PO Box 3369
London NW7 3EN

Tel: +44 (0)181 906 0002

E-mail: sballan@cix.compulink.co.uk

Psion Games Deluxe



Yet another games pack. Groan. Well, no groan actually, for as much as I try to despise this continual stream of 'trivial' and un-businesslike software I still can't fail to get hooked on it. There's no real reason to call this the 'deluxe' games pack really, other than the fact that your £39.95 buys you a 512K ROM SSD (non-erasable) stuffed with six games covering a surprisingly wide spectrum of interests. Here's the lowdown:

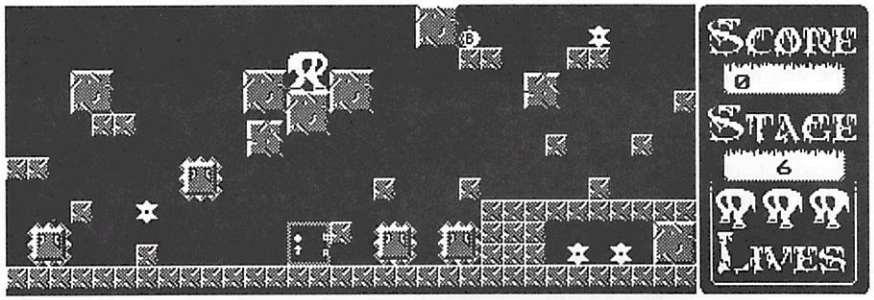
HORACE: A simple 1980s style 'dodge the ghosts' arcade game, Horace falls somewhere between the classic arcade 'Pacman' and the Series 3 mini-classic, 'Jumpy'. As with all games in this pack, Horace has a well polished and configurable interface that allows you to redefine the game control keys to your own preferences, either partially or completely disable the sound effects, and view high scores. The game play involves nothing more than traversing a series of 64 levels, each requiring you to pick up all the stars on the screen while avoiding the assorted beasties. Thankfully said beasties are quite unintelligent, and only repeat their traversing of the screen *ad infinitum*, never changing direction specifically to hound you.

Despite this the game certainly doesn't suffer from being too simple: it took me

the best part of an hour to get to the third level. As with every one of the games presented here, Horace is both enjoyable and attractive to look at. This may not be a particularly original concept or implementation, but Horace is a good game nonetheless: not quite as much fun as the original shareware 'Jumpy' for the Series 3 Classic, but still worth a look.

comes from the fact that the ball bounces off walls as it hits them, and the numerous 'special' tiles can speed up the ball, slow it down, add random bounces and so on.

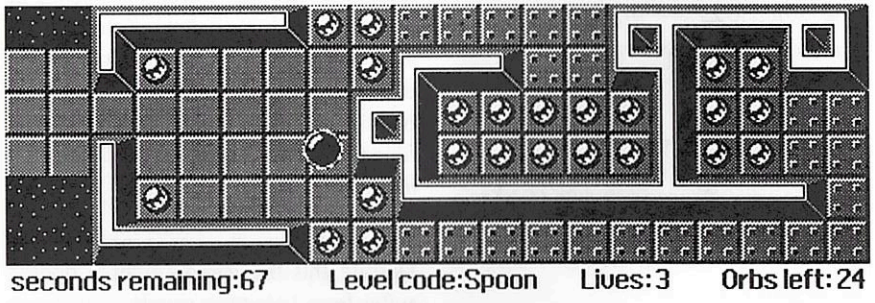
It took me a little while to get the hang of controlling the motion of the ball, but it was worth a little perseverance, as the



Horace, Spooksville for your 3a

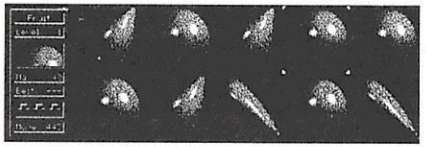
STIGMA: This is an original idea, falling somewhere between PopOut and Bomz, both included with Psion's last Games Pack 3a. The object of the game is to complete the 100 different levels, each requiring you to 'drive' a ball around the screen with the arrow keys. The difficulty game requires a good mix of dexterity and strategy to complete the levels. Unusual but good.

STRANGE FRUIT: Strange is an appropriate title. The opening screen shows only twelve shapes in two rows of six



Stigma—bouncy, bouncy

each. The object of the exercise is to make all the shapes match whichever shape is shown in the toggle-able control panel in the fewest possible number of



Strange Fruit. Well, strange...

moves. Of course, all is by no means straightforward: you select a shape to change with the cursor keys and press the spacebar to change it. Sometimes the shape changes as expected, and sometimes other shapes change with it. There are 32 different levels to play, grouped into four stages of eight levels each. A pure logic puzzle this one. Most unusual, but it's a welcome change from more conventional games, and one that works very well on the 3a.

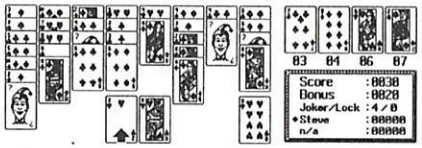
Ones	2	3 of a kind	24	Chance	22
Twos	2	4 of a kind	22	#1 Total	70
Threes	12	Full house	25	#1 Bonus	35
Fours	16	Low straight	30	#2 Total	213
Fives	20	High straight	40	#2 Bonus	10
Sixes	10	!! FiveOAK !!	50	Score	320
Start				Steve	320
				n/a	0

Fiveoak. An ace dice game

FIVEOAK: This is an almost-if-not-quite exact replica of the popular dice game, 'Yahtzee'—very similar to traditional poker dice, but played with dice of the conventional spotted variety.

Fiveoak is probably the most complete version of this game that the Series 3a owner could wish for. The interface is good, the scoring is in constant view on screen, and every aspect of the game plays extremely well. This is the last word in computerised dice games.

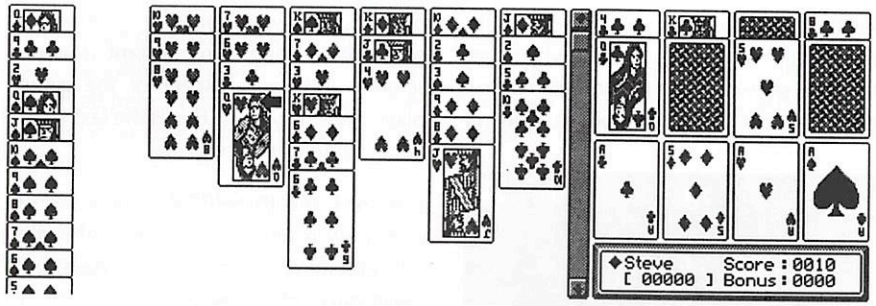
LOGJAM and PUSHPOP: It now seems obligatory to put at least one card game into entertainment packs these days, but Psion have gone one better this time by including two. Logjam and Pushpop are actually similar in appearance, though



Logjam—looks great, but hard to read

they play quite differently. Both quite original and bearing no resemblance to the traditional old 'Klondike' type patience (solitaire) game. Logjam involves pulling exposed cards of the same suit off the bottom of eight columns onto 'base' piles in groups of at least three, with jokers being 'wild'.

Pushpop requires the player to build cards onto aces in ascending sequence. Cards can be built in descending sequence of the same suit on the eight main columns to assist in clearing blockages, and cards may be placed onto one of eight temporary positions while cards are moved around. I found Pushpop particularly enjoyable, and had difficulty putting this one down. The only criticism with these two games are that the author has opted to make the card faces



Pushpop—another damn fine patience game

perfectly lifelike, which makes them look very impressive on the high resolution 3a screen, but the numbers on the cards can be tricky to read under dim lighting conditions.

Just like the patience game supplied with the 1 and 2Mb 3a's (and as a part of Psion's last 'Games Pack 3a') both Logjam and Pushpop add a little gambling element at the end of each successful round. You can bet your 'winnings' on whether the next card drawn is higher or lower than the one currently displayed. A strange little add-on in my opinion, but I guess it will appeal to those with a gambling bent.

I often find myself wishing that Psion would spend more time developing 'serious' applications rather than the steady stream of games they seem to turn out. The things must obviously sell well though, and I must confess to spending an hour or so longer than necessary in the course of this review. Games of this calibre are surprisingly addictive for all but the most stout-hearted of 'anti-game' Psion users, and that in itself must be the best testimonial to their quality. This compendium is highly recommended, just like their last games pack . . .

Steve Clack

InfoBOX

Games Deluxe is available from all Psion dealers at £39.95 on SSD. It will not run on the Series 3 'Classic' machines.

Sorry—no shareware reviews this time, but more will be appearing in an expanded 'A Closer Look' starting with issue 6 - Ed.

Buy & Sell...

For Sale

Purple Software Toolkit v3.01f
Spell Checker and Thesaurus
Games Pack 1
Games Pack 3

All manuals included - £110

Contact Grant Mearns:

Tel: +44 (0)171 371 2428

Winlink 1.1 file transfer utility, including disk and manual - £12 including postage and packing within UK.

Contact Gunter Wittenberg:

Tel: +44 (0)181866 5607

Wanted

RAM SSDs, any size. Also interested in Flash SSDs.

Contact John Erik Schoenheyder:

Tel: +47 92600978 (Norway)

Fax: +47 72420765

E-mail: jonerik@oslonett.no

Classifieds

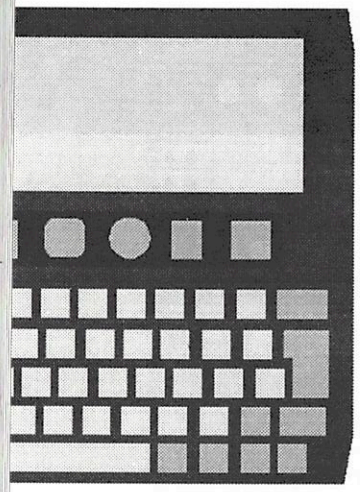
Any items for sale or wanted will happily be published within Palmtop free of charge subject to availability of space. Please send details to the address given on page 2.

Wanted

Series 3a - 512K or larger
Spellchecker and Thesaurus
Games Pack 3a
128K or 256K Flash SSD
128K RAM SSD

Contact David Huddie:

Tel: +44 (0)1590 683852 after 4pm



Making Contact

Creating and managing a contact database on your 3a. We take a quick look at the two major contenders

by Steve Clack

Anyone who deals regularly with customers probably has a requirement for some kind of contact management. In its simplest form this can be nothing more than a basic database of contact names and addresses, an AGENDA file of appointments, reminders and meetings, and perhaps some additional supplementary notes in a group of word processor files.

The big problem with the above solution is of course that it lacks that all-important factor—integration. When you see an agenda entry to remind you to telephone someone there is no direct connection to that person's address in DATA, nor to any additional notes or correspondence you may have had with that person or group.

Contact management software attempts to bring all of the essential elements of contact management together within a single package. This is not necessarily a straightforward operation: some people merely have a list of individual clients with no interrelationships., whereas others may deal with several companies, institutes or groups, each with a hierarchy of contacts within it. The best contact management software will cope with the most complex 'tree' of contacts, and keep everything in structured order where it belongs.

A number of such packages exist for desktop computers, some of which are networkable across a whole group of computers, and some even offer file synchronisation to laptop computers so that users can update their contact details while out 'on the road, transferring all new information correctly on returning back to base.

Only two dedicated contact management packages currently exist for the Psion Series 3a: these are Contact Edge by Total Computer Systems and 'ACT!', written for Symantec by Yellow Computing in Germany.

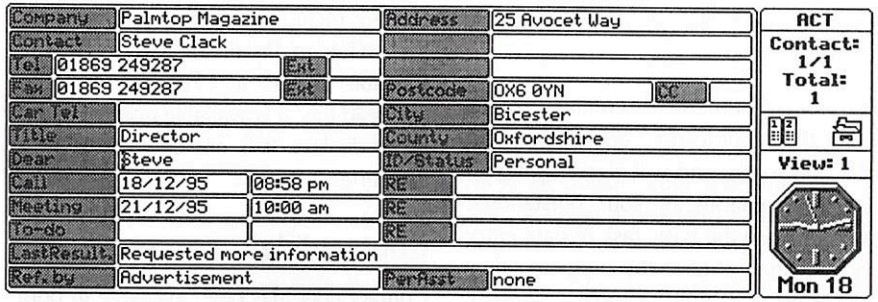
ACT!

ACT! for the Series 3a is a slightly cut-down version of Symantec's popular contact management package written for PC and Macintosh computers. It provides a ready-made but fairly adaptable template into which contact name, address and other personal details can be entered.

The aforementioned template covers three complete screenfuls of information and includes 15 user definable 'fields' which you can configure for your own personal requirements.

simple to use. Half an hour browsing through the on-screen menus and trying out various options was enough to get a good idea of the program's capabilities and strengths.

I tried importing about 1000 names and addresses directly from a Psion DATA file without problems, though the operation took several minutes to complete. If you use the PC (Windows) version of ACT! then files on your PC and 3a are easily synchronised when transferring data in either direction by means of the 'Direct Link' menu option. Mac users are forced to transfer data across as a plain data file though, as no such option exists for the Macintosh version of the program. This is a painful shortcoming for Mac users (such as myself). Perhaps this will be addressed in the future, though, and I will keep a watchful eye open for this.



One of the three main views of ACT!

One of the main strengths of ACT! is its simplicity in comparison to its power—it's a respectably powerful solution to most people's contact management requirements, while still being admirably

Apart from the obvious function of keeping a simple database, ACT! monitors all of the major aspects of your day-to-day contacts. If you want to phone a customer then simply look up the person

in ACT!, press the 'Dial' menu option and the software will dial the number for you. You can then view an on-screen stopwatch in case you need to bill your time by the minute. When a call is completed a few simple keypresses will record a summary line of notes for the call together with a log of whether you made contact or note. This is most useful if you want to be able to remind someone of all the times you tried to contact them, but they were unavailable.

If you want to send a letter, fax or memo to a contact then just choose the corresponding menu option to bring up a WORD template with the person's name and address details and salutation already inserted, and the date stamped in the appropriate place. This is great for bashing out correspondence quickly, provided you are happy to do all this on your tiny Psion keyboard. All such correspondence is automatically kept and associated with the relevant contact for future reference.

ACT! offers numerous summary screens to log all of your to-do's, activities, phone calls and so on, and will always give you timely summaries of your outstanding tasks. To ease the basic task of data entry and updating of tasks the program offers numerous multiple choice 'pop-up' boxes which you can configure to your heart's desire. The 15 can be set up to take whatever data type you desire, be it textual notes, pop-up boxes or whatever, and you can even edit the titles of the main (non-configurable) fields.

ACT! is by no means the perfect tool though, and it seems to have a practical limitation of around 1500 records or so for the database. Searching on large files is okay if you are looking in a specific field (such as surname or company name), but painfully slow if you need to search several fields of a large database. Also, being a flat file database ACT! does not allow a complex hierarchy of institutes and contacts, though you can have more than one contact per record. Finally, the screens manage to cram in lots of information, but this is at the expense of readability. The three main data entry screens all use the same font size as the smallest size available in the 3a word processor, and this cannot be zoomed in any way. For many people this is just too difficult to read comfortably, and may even cause some users to abandon the package entirely.

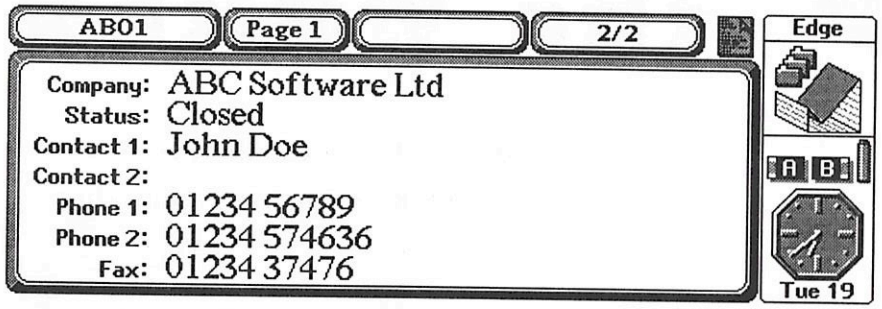
ACT! is available on PC floppy disk at £89.95 including VAT (requiring a PC and 3Link to install it), and should be available on SSD at £99.95 by the time you read this. It is available from all major Psion dealers. It is not compatible with the Series 3 'Classic'.

Contact Edge

Contact Edge has been available in both Series 3 and 3a versions for some time now, and in some ways the user interface is beginning to show its age.

Contact Edge boasts to be a 'relational' database program, which means that you can have multiple contacts for each client or company, assign a 'territory' to each client independently and generally arrange your customers in a realistic multi-tiered structure. In this respect Contact Edge promises much more than ACT!, but the reality is less rosy. Company or institute data input is via two simple entry screens allowing the input of company name name, address, telephone and territory details, plus up to 14 user-definable fields which can be set up to show your own choice of data similarly to ACT!, and which then appear in one or more subsequent entry screens. Contact data (within each company) is via a further entry screen.

Like ACT! the data is not zoomable on screen, though this time the program suffers from showing too *little* data on screen, and from the text size being unnecessarily big for the average user. both the entry and presentation is visually quite crude, and this is a major area where the software could be improved. When it comes to scheduling events, appointments and things to do, Contact Edge relies on the Psion's built-in AGENDA. This is reasonably satisfactory, though I much prefer ACT!'s technique of allowing all the data to be integrated into the program. In this respect ACT! offers far superior tools for managing your contacts and summarising your actions.



Contact Edge—suffering from too little information on screen

An additional utility known as *Contact Link* will map all fields from an existing Psion database for import into Contact Edge, and for multi-user environments *Contact Team* will allow several users to pool their information from Psion-based Contact Edge databases onto a central *Lotus Notes* database running on a PC.

All in all Contact Edge gives the impression of being a program with enormous potential, but currently lacking many of the genuinely useful features of ACT!, and suffering from a rather dated user interface. Given a major facelift and the addition of some extra functionality this could be a major winner, but for now ACT! has rather more to recommend it.

Concluded on page 40...

Wonders of the WORLD

Pete Sipple delves into the capabilities of the Series 3a's own WORLD database application

The World application contains a database of 400 cities for the Series 3 and 500 for the 3a. From the impressive map screen a city's current time, sunrise/sunset times and telephone codes can be viewed. Whilst this application is of most use to the jet-setters amongst us, it is nonetheless an excellent addition to the built-in Psion applications.

WORLD has three main user types:

1. The business user: for making that call back to the UK office from overseas. The international dialling codes, together with the time in the target destination are a godsend.
2. The average user: locating a town quickly pinpoints it's position on the world map with a flashing cursor. Very handy for those who can't remember exactly where to find Mogadishu on the map, or the name of Paraguay's capital. Great for trivia addicts.
3. The Psion aficionado - WORLD is an excellent demonstration of all that makes the Series 3/3a great. It's fast, detailed, and visually impressive.

Entering new locations

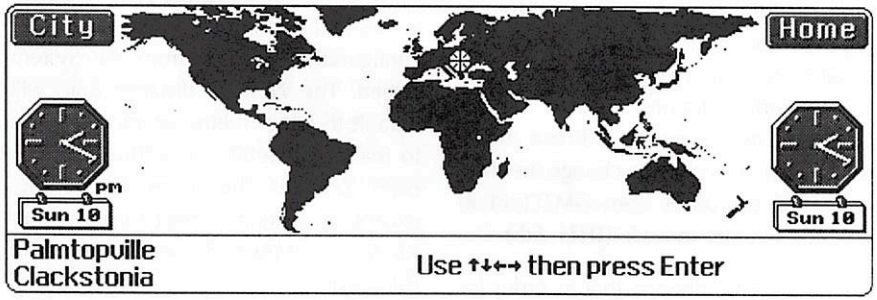
The first thing that most WORLD users will want to do is to set up their home town. This is done from the 'Add City' menu option. City name, area dialling code and time zone are entered from this screen, as well as the location.

In order for distances and sunrise/sunset times to be calculated, all map locations adhere to standard longitude and latitude references. For the uninitiated, longitude and latitude are measured in degrees, minutes and seconds. Latitude is expressed as a degree between 0 and 90 North or South of the Equator, and each degree is approximately 69 miles long. Longitude co-ordinates are from 0° to 180° East or West of the GMT (Greenwich Mean Time) line in London. Degrees of longitude are longest along the equator (about 70 miles), and a matter of feet at the two poles.

Grid reference details for Pete's house

WORLD allows for degrees and minutes to be entered. This means that it is possible to pinpoint the location of a town to around one square mile (about 1.6 kilometres). Unfortunately, WORLD provides no easy way to make use of this level of accuracy when placing a town. There are two options, and both are relatively crude. Option one is to move the cursor crosshair to the approximate location, the other is to enter the location of the nearest town and make a guess. As mentioned above, one mile per minute of angle is a good place to start, so 055°045 N is around ten miles south of 055°055 N. It's then a case of trial and error, using distance from your home town as a guide.

The WORLD database allows for 32 cities to be either added or amended. For most users this should be ample, but if you need to make lots of changes then additional files can be created from the 'New File' menu option. By creating more than one WORLD file you can therefore add as many new towns and locations as you wish. The 32 location limit can still be tedious, but you can create one separate file for each country or region to which you want to add new places. On the positive side there is no practical limit to the number of WORLD files you can have on your Psion, just like the number of WORD or SHEET files.



Another well-known resort location...

Checking distances

You can use WORLD to check the distance between any two locations, though it's a little bit fiddly to do so:

1. Find one of the locations (or the nearest place to it) so that it appears in the left hand box below the date window.
2. Go to the 'Set home city' menu option and set 'home' to the location in step 1.
3. Select the second location to appear in the left hand box in the usual way. The distance between the cities will appear in the lower centre of the screen. The tedious bit is that you must then reset your home city back to its normal value.

Other features

The 'Current Country Only' option ('Lock Country' on the Series 3) is a rather nice idea. This allows you to scroll through a list of all towns in the specified country using the left and right arrows.

One slightly curious menu option is 'Update Country'. The main use of this is to allow for changes to a National telephone code. Options exist to change Capital City (happens all the time, doesn't it?), as well as to change the time zone and the offset from GMT (just in case the country moves). **(!!?? - Ed.)**

It's worth remembering that in order for the world clocks to be accurate, adjustments must be made to correct for summer time adjustments. The Series 3 divides the world into three zones, 'Europe, Northern and Southern'. I find it most convenient to consult 'Teletext' on the TV and check a few random cities for accuracy, correcting the time zones where appropriate. A rough guide to summer time date ranges is given in the Psion manual.

Users should also note that both the Series 3 and 3a manuals make reference to the fact that WORLD files are linked to the particular version of the machine on which they are made. This means that it may not always be possible to copy WORLD files from machine to machine. Indeed, users of the Series 3a emulator will find that existing WORLD files will not run, and that the only way to fix this is to delete the offending file from the \WLD\ directory.

Kilometres and Miles

Finally, have you noticed that your miles/kilometres settings revert back to default settings whenever you close WORLD and re-open it? This is governed by whether you have set centimetres or inches in the 'Units' section of the printer configuration window from the System screen. The WORLD distance units will default to either metric or imperial units to match this setting. Unfortunately you can't prevent this from happening, except by writing a macro using either KMAC or MACSYS (see issue 2 of *Palmtop*).

Programmers' Workshop

by Andrew Baldwin

Quiknote - 'Build an Application' (Part 1)

The first installment of a three part series teaching you how to write a *real* application in OPL.

DIY software

One of the beauties of the Series 3/3a is the in-built OPL language. Whilst it doesn't allow you to produce applications quite as good as the built in AGENDA and WORD applications, it does mean that almost anyone can write the odd little (or not so little) utility for themselves. Indeed, much of the vast amount of Series 3/3a freeware and shareware is created by people who have written something they wanted and then made it available to others.

Although the OPL programming manual provides most of the details you require, it can be a little daunting to write a whole application from scratch, especially for users with little programming experience.

Well, be daunted no more. Over the next 3 Programmers' Workshops I'm going to lead you through the creation of a simple but potentially useful little application.

Cowboy builders!

If you've ever followed a programming series before then you'll know that it's the most annoying thing in the world to have diligently typed in a whole ream of code only to find that it won't work until you've typed in next month's installment as well!

That's why at the end of each article I aim to leave you with something that works: not just half a program that won't even translate. Occasionally this means we will need to add a whole set of empty procedures that do nothing as yet but will be filled out in a later article.

A quick note for Series 3 (not 3a) owners. This course is mainly based around the Series 3a, however with a few small alterations (which I will endeavour to point out) everything we do should work almost identically on the Series 3.

Now onto the subject of the series—the *Quiknote* application.

Quiknote

How often have you been on the train, for example, and suddenly had a great idea that you want to note down? You whip out your 3/3a only to find yourself trying to decide where to store it. You could create a WORD file, but then you need to go to the bother of creating a new file and opening the program, by which time the impetus may have gone. Furthermore, wouldn't it be nice if later on you could see just *when* you had come up with the earth shattering idea? Well, this is where *Quiknote* comes in.

Every time you run or jump to the *Quiknote* program it prompts you to add a small note with a subject, a category, and a few lines of text. It then stores this with the current time and date. Later on you can view and search through the various notes at your leisure.

And that's it: short, sweet, and hopefully useful as well!

Design issues

Well I say that's it, but in fact there are a number of things we need to think about, even with something as seemingly simple as this.

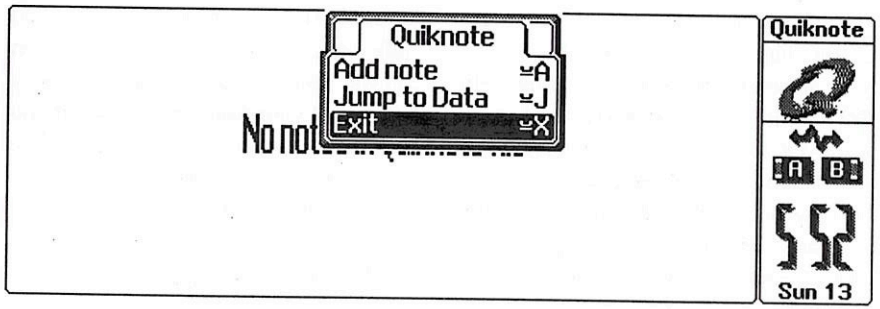
The most important issue is how are we going to store these notes? We could store each one in a separate file, but this wouldn't be a good approach since the user would end up with lots of small files scattered around. Since we know all our notes are going to be small, it would be much better if we store them all in a single file.

Now it just so happens that there is a type of file that is ideally suited to holding lots of small entries, with each entry split into different fields. Furthermore, OPL offers easy access and manipulation of this type of file. I am of course referring to Database (DBF) files as used by the internal DATA application.

So, let us use a single DBF file to store all our notes. A further benefit of this approach is that the user can then use the DATA application to do all the searching and reviewing of notes, which means that all *Quiknote* needs to perform is the actual function of adding notes.

Actually, we're going to add one other feature as well, which will be a 'Jump to Data' command that will automate the process of editing the file using DATA. But more of that later.

We're going to make use of Menus, Dialogs and a whole variety of other OPL features, and the finished application should look something like the screen-shot on the next page. As you can see, there is a menu with three options, 'Add note', 'Jump to Data' and 'Exit'. This is used to access all the features of the program. The main window is going to display a list of all the notes in the file.



***Quiknote* in the flesh**

Solid foundations

The first version of *Quiknote* that we are going to create by the end of this installment does not have all the features of the finished program: it will in fact be much simpler, but it will provide us with the basis upon which we can add the *real* features in the next two articles.

If you look at the program listing on page 37 you will see that the program is really relatively straightforward. It does in fact contain only 11 procedures, and of those only 4 contain any real code. The rest are just empty calls that we will flesh out later.

If you've been reading my series of 'Programmers Workshop' articles to date then you'll know by now that the basis of a good Psion program is the main *'event'* handling loop. That is what we are going to write in this first article.

This loop is located in the **qngetev:** procedure of the *Quiknote* program. The procedure breaks down in to two logical parts: firstly it waits for an incoming event such as a key press (using the **GETEVENT** command) and then it processes the event to see if it is of a type that the program is interested in.

There are a number of different types of event that the program checks for. Firstly it looks to see if it has been sent a *shut-down* message from the system screen. If it has, then it closes down the program immediately by calling the **qnexit:** procedure. After this the program checks for keypresses: firstly for the 'Psion' key, then the 'Menu' key. If necessary it displays the menu and waits for the user to select an option. After this, it can check if the user selected one of the three commands (either from a hotkey combination or from the menu). Finally the program checks for a special event: whether it has just become the foreground application. If this is the case then it calls the *add* function in the same way as if the user had selected 'Add note' from the menu.

What makes an application?

If you think I made a counting mistake earlier when I said there were only 4 procedures with any real code in them,

then check again. The section at the top of the file is not a procedure in the normal sense. Instead of starting with **PROC** and ending with **ENDP**, it starts with **APP** and ends with **ENDA**. This is a special type of block, of which there can be only one in the program. It tells the translator that instead of being a normal OPL program, this is in fact going to be an application that can be installed with its own icon on the system screen just like any commercially available program.

The word after the **APP** command is the name of the file as the user will see it when the program is installed. Unlike file names, this name can contain any mixture of upper and lower case letters and they will be displayed exactly as written.

The line that follows is very important, since it tells the system what type of application we are, and whether we use a list of files. We want to be a *type 0* application, which means we don't use any files (this is not strictly true but the system doesn't need to know this!). But why does it say $9000 instead of zero? Well, the dollar sign just means that this is a hexadecimal number rather than decimal. The $9000 is actually a combination of two extra flags: $1000, which means we have a Series 3a type (48x48 pixels including grey) icon, and $8000 which means we are not going to receive any message if the user chooses the 'New file' option on the system screen .

The next line tells the translator where to find an icon file to include in the application file. I drew a nice little icon called 'quiknote.pic' and if you want an icon you will need to create it using a drawing program of your own. Don't worry if you can't make an icon, just remove this line and the program will be given a simple default icon instead.

In the beginning...

There isn't much more to this first version of *Quiknote*. The **qnmenu%:** function displays the main user menu and returns whichever option the user selects. The main **Quiknote:** procedure controls the overall program running order, and finally the **qnginit:** procedure initialises the graphics, including turning on the status window and drawing a border.

Type the program in from the listing, translate it, and install it on the system screen. You can leave out the **REM** lines if you wish, but I would advise typing them in as well so that in the following two articles you will have a better idea of what is going on when we come to fleshing out the program.

In the second article of this series I'll be providing the data file handling sections of the program. If you're new to programming then you'll need to refer to your Psion Programming Manual supplied with the machine in order to work out what all the keywords mean. Just spend a little time persevering with this and it should all begin to make sense.

Andrew Baldwin

The first *Quiknote* listing to type in:

```
APP Quiknote
 TYPE $9000
 REM Remove the next line if you don't have an icon file
 ICON "quiknote.pic"
ENDA

PROC Quiknote:
REM The first procedure to be run
REM Define important global variables here
 GLOBAL scwid%                REM The screen width
 GLOBAL schi%                 REM The screen height

 qninit:
 DO
    qnredraw:
    qngetev:
 UNTIL 0
ENDP

PROC qnredraw:
REM Draw the last few notes in the window
ENDP

PROC qngetev:
REM The main event analysing procedure
 LOCAL event%(6),l$(1),w$(128)

REM Program will wait here until an event occurs
 GETEVENT event%()

REM A file message from the system screen
 IF event%(1)=$404
    w$=GETCMD$
    l$=LEFT$(w$,1)
    w$=MID$(w$,2,128)
    IF l$="X"
       qnexit:
    ENDIF
 ENDIF

REM If the user pressed the Psion key
 IF event%(1) AND 512
    event%(1)=event%(1)-512
 ENDIF
```

```
 REM Menu key - display the menu
  IF event%(1)=290
     event%(1)=qnmenu%:
  ENDIF

 REM User pressed "a" or "Psion-a"
  IF event%(1)=%a
     qnadd:
  ENDIF

 REM User pressed "j" or "Psion-j"
  IF event%(1)=%j
     qnjump:
  ENDIF

 REM User pressed "x" or "Psion-x"
  IF event%(1)=%x
     qnexit:
  ENDIF

 REM If program has jumped to foreground
  IF event%(1)=$401
     qnadd:
  ENDIF
ENDP

PROC qnmenu%:
REM The menu displaying procedure
 LOCAL k%

REM Lock to prevent shutdown message during menu
 LOCK ON
 mINIT
 mCARD "Quiknote","Add note",%a,"Jump to Data",-%j,"Exit",%x
 k%=MENU
 LOCK OFF

 RETURN k%
ENDP

PROC qnexit:
REM Called to exit the program
 STOP
ENDP
```



```
PROC qnadd:
REM Called to add a new note
ENDP

PROC qnjump:
REM Called to jump to the data app
ENDP

PROC qninit:
REM Called to initialise the program
 qnginit:
 qndinit:
ENDP

PROC qnginit:
REM You don't need this next line on a Series 3
 LOCAL xy%(4)
 gUPDATE OFF
REM Called to initialise the graphics
REM First get the size of the screen
 scwid%=gWIDTH
 schi%=gHEIGHT
REM Turn on the status window
 STATUSWIN ON
REM Find out where the window is
 STATWININFO(-1,xy%())
REM Now we resize the screen to accommodate the window
 scwid%=scwid%-(scwid%-xy%(1))
REM On a Series 3 remove the previous 2 lines and instead use:
REM       scwid%=scwid%-50
 gSETWIN 0,0,scwid%,schi%
REM Add a border to the main window
 gBORDER 0
ENDP

PROC qndinit:
REM Called to open or create the data file
```

Note: **REM** lines can be omitted if preferred. Words are shown in **bold** only to make the listing easier to read. Type in all bold words as normal.

...Making Contact, from page 28

Contact Edge is available from major Psion dealers, or from Total Computer Systems on +44 (0)1992 575151. It costs £30 for a single user copy, with evaluation copies available on request. We will keep you updated on any new versions of Contact Edge which may appear, and in the meantime a comprehensive review covering ACT!'s finer points will appear within the pages of *Palmtop* over the next few months.

Psion Around the World, from page 52

Authors of shareware applications are invited to contact us. The most interesting applications will be reviewed in a Psion Bulletin or in Psion Nieuws.

Feel free to contact us for more information:

Psion Gebruikersvereniging Nederland

Postbus 82

8700 AB BOLSWARD

The Netherlands

CompuServe 100412,1211

telefax / BBS +31.515.574188

Psnippets...

Several readers have asked why a picture of the front cover of issue one of *Palmtop* appearing in an article in Psion's *Gold Support Bulletin* is different to the one they have. The front cover shown was from a promotional printing done by Widget Software here in the UK. The Widget version of issue 1 has a white cover with a photograph on the front, whereas the original cover is yellow with a graphic of a Psion keyboard on it. The content of both versions is identical, so don't worry that you are missing anything!

By the way, the first 100 or so copies of issue 1 were hand printed from an old 300dpi laser printer (one side at a time), then cut, stapled, folded and guillotined by hand. If your copy has a rather ragged edge opposite the spine then you are the proud owner of one of these 'limited edition' collector's items! Just be sure to keep it though, as it may be worth a fortune in the years to come...

The Editor

It's not a filofax!

It's much more than just a computerised organiser, but some of the features and capabilities are not always obvious to the beginner. Pete Sipple gives some insights into making the most of your Psion.

You've invested in a Psion Series 3 or 3a. It's an impressive machine: compact, attractive, powerful. It's an electronic filofax. You like to impress your friends with the WORLD screen, you remind yourself of important birthdays with a cute fanfare, and maybe you even dial your phone numbers by sticking your Psion over the mouthpiece. The Series 3 is an impressive machine, but it's more than an electronic organiser. This article is unashamedly aimed at the user for whom the trusty Series 3 is currently nothing more than an address book or diary.

Reading the pages of *Palmtop* will show you that the Series 3 can bring so much more. With time and effort you can learn the intricacies of OPL programming, and maybe write some of your own software. You can explore the shareware scene and add utilities, games and pictures, or you can even connect yourself to the Internet. But where do you start? Do you need a degree in computers? What are the pitfalls? Will it cost a fortune? For those in doubt, this article will hopefully show you how to make your Psion into something more than just an 'electronic organiser'.

The Series 3 isn't an organiser, it's a computer. It has an operating system, can be programmed, and can interface with other computers. This last point is an important one, for, to really make your Series 3 work for it's money, you need to be able to connect it up to a larger computer. This is not as daunting as it may seem.

Why bother?

There are lots of reasons:

1. **Safety**. You'll be able to backup your Series 3 onto your desktop (or laptop) computer. That way, if your Psion suffers a terminal fault, loses it's power, or, horror of horrors, gets stolen, then your vital information won't be lost forever.

2. **Memory**. There's a lot more storage space on a desktop computer than on a Series 3. Most full-sized computers have at least 40 Megabytes of storage space, whilst the best a Series 3a can manage, is 2 Megabytes. Okay, you could increase the memory of your Series 3 by adding plug-in SSD cards, but have you seen the prices recently? In the UK, a 1 megabyte Flash SSD costs around £120, compared to a PC floppy disk which holds nearly 1.5 Megabytes of data, and costs much less than £1.

3. **Flexibility**. Taking word processing as an example, a link to a desktop computer makes Psion's WORD application much more powerful. You can write letters and documents whilst out-and-about, or during quiet moments, and then copy them onto your larger computer where they can more easily be worked on. The Series 3 can save its documents either as plain ASCII text or RTF files, which can be read by just about any common word processor. In common with a lot of other Series 3 users I tend to write most of my documents on my Series 3a, then export the files onto my PC where I can adjust the format of the document, spellcheck it, and tidy the document making best use of the larger screen and keyboard.

4. **Printing**. Using the '3Link' RS232 serial link you can connect to your computer's printer. If you want to print from your Series 3 then you can either use a Parallel Link (around £30), or the *3Link* if you have a PC. The software supplied with the *3Link* allows a PC to act as a middle-man between your Psion and a printer, and with a program called PsiWin *(reviewed in issue 2—Ed.)*, you can even use Windows' own built-in *TrueType* fonts to create printouts in exactly the same fonts as your PC.

5. **Emulation**. Don't look so worried. With the Series 3 and 3a emulators (which are free), it's possible to treat your PC as a larger Series 3/3a. If for any reason your Psion isn't with you, then you can still access all of your Psion data using the 3a emulator. If you make changes to your information then the updated file can even be copied back onto your Psion at a later date.

6. **Shareware and Freeware**. As you'll see from the reviews in *Palmtop* there's a LOT of software around for the Psion. The quality of much of it is excellent, and most of it is either free or very inexpensive. In the next issue I'll go into shareware in a little more detail, telling you where to get it, and how to use it.

7. **Going On-line**. Access to bulletin boards, on-line services, e-mail and the Internet. This requires a modem and a 'phone line, and has already been discussed in some detail in issue one of *Palmtop*.

What do I need to connect?

You'll need two things in order to get connected:

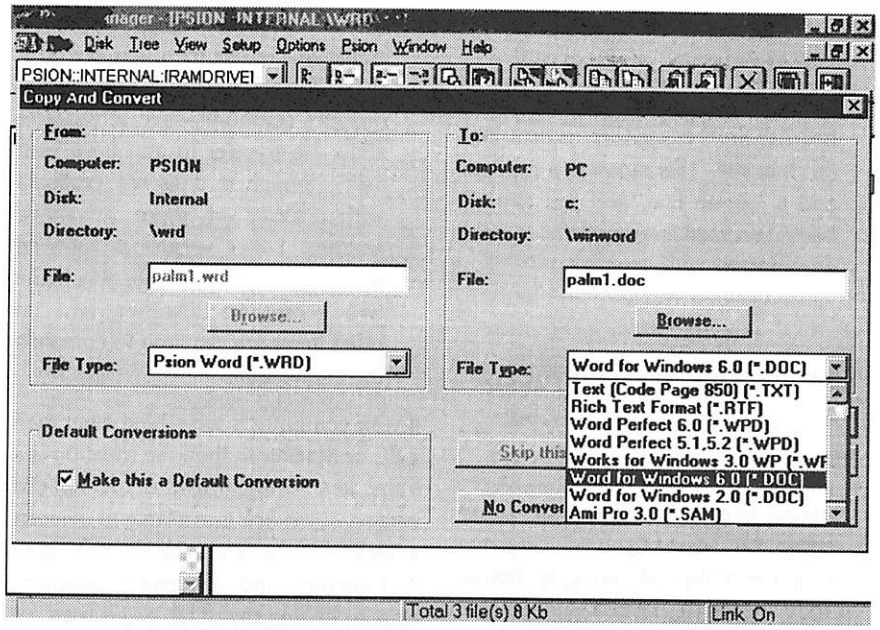
1. **Access to either a desktop or laptop computer**. Most of you will have one of these either at work or home. You'll need to have a spare serial (RS232) port available on your computer. Most computers have a least one of these. They're at the back, sometimes labelled as COM1 and COM2. Serial ports come in at least three flavours, PC ones have a 9-pin or 25 pin 'D' shaped connector, and Apple computers have a round connector similar to the Psion *3Link*.

2. **The *3Link* serial lead**. Unfortunately, this is quite an expensive purchase. In the UK it costs around £80. Don't let the price put you off though: it'll be well worth it. The *3Link* package includes the link lead itself, the manual, and a floppy disk containing the software. If you are to be using it with a PC then you need to buy the package as 'PsiWin', which includes Psion's latest sophisticated software for Microsoft Windows. If It's for an Apple Macintosh then you buy it as the 'Macintosh Link'. This version includes some attractive software to allow file transfer to and from your Mac', though it does not compare with PsiWin in more advanced features. Either version is supplied with a suitable cable to attach the two computers together, and no other items are required to complete the connection.

If your computer is something other than a PC or Macintosh then the situation is a little less straightforward. A special version of the link is available to connect a Series 3/3a or Acorn Pocketbook to an Archimedes, and shareware programs exist to enable the *3Link* to be used for communications with Atari and Amiga computers. These require the separate purchase of the PC version of the *3Link,* then setup with the right software in each case. If your computer is none of the above then you will need to set up both computers into a terminal emulation mode (a Psion version is supplied with the *3Link*), then transfer files using a protocol such as XMODEM or KERMIT. Communications with each major type of computer will be covered in future issues of *Palmtop*.

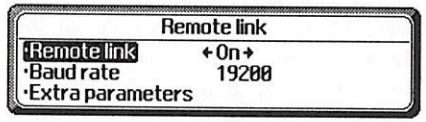
Making the connection

The physical side of the link is obvious: one end goes into the six pin socket on the left of your Series 3, with the other end plugging into your computer's serial port. The Series 3 already contains the



A file being copied and converted from a Series 3a to PC using PsiWin

necessary connection software, but to allow your larger computer to talk to the Series 3 you will need to install the programs supplied for your own type of computer as described above.

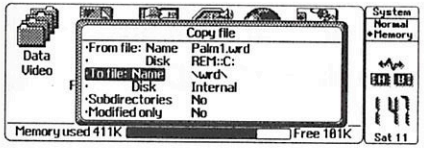


Switching on the link . . .

Once the software is loaded onto your computer you can run it, switch on your remote link option from the Psion System screen, and the connection should be made.

Connection is normally a straightforward matter, but occasionally some problems may arise: notably with the baud rate. Both machines need to send and receive the files in the same 'language' and at a constant speed. The latest version of software supplied with *PsiWin* comes with a user friendly setup program which makes installing fairly painless. The manual supplied with the *3Link* should help you through any difficulties, but for most users, the process should be very easy and problem free.

Over the years, the PC software has been improved and revised. Originally, the *3Link* came with a crude communications package called MCLINK, which was superseded by RCOM and now by *PsiWin* (for Windows). PsiWin, reviewed in *Palmtop* Issue 3, allows users familiar with Windows 'drag and drop' to copy files between machines, converting the information into a host of different formats. This takes a lot of the hassle out of getting, say, WordPerfect to read a Psion WORD file, or Excel from understanding the spreadsheet information in the Psion SHEET format.



If you're using a PC without Windows then copying (but not converting), can be done using MCLINK and RCOM, and also from the Series 3 itself. Some users reading this article will not be aware of the built-in file manager on their Series 3. By pressing the <Tab> key from the main system screen a list of the files in your machine's Internal memory will be shown. The left and right arrow keys can also be used to browse the contents of any SSDs fitted to the A and B drives of your Psion. If you've made a successful link to your larger computer then the contents of the computer can also be displayed from Psion's file manager. From there, files can be copied, renamed or deleted.

The above example shows an MS Word file on a PC being copied to the Internal drive of a Series 3a. The REM::C: refers to the PC's hard disk. The 'squiggle' in the status window indicates a successful linkup to another computer.

Hopefully, this article has given you an insight into making the leap from an 'electronic organiser' to a palmtop computer. In the next issue, I'll take a look at Shareware and the 3Link: how to find it, how to install it, and how to make it work.

If any readers feel they would benefit from a 'beginners' article on any aspect of the Series 3/3a, please let me know, care of the *Palmtop* address or by e-mail.

Pete Sipple

e-mail: psipple@cix.compulink.co.uk

CompuServe: 100333,3266

Notepad 5.21

Graham Foster takes in-depth look at a sophisticated and flexible alternative to the built-in AGENDA

Notepad is a shareware program written by Mark Esposito of Pelican Software Inc. in the USA (hence the pelican at the top of the page!) Notepad was originally conceived as a to-do list manager for the Psion Series 3. The Series 3 didn't have a built-in to-do list manager, so several third party packages were written: for example John Whiting of Lexsoft produced 'Todo' and Mark Esposito of Pelican Software produced 'Notepad'. Both packages are still available for Series 3 users and the most current version numbers are Todo 1.21c and Notepad 4.6. Lexsoft has not (as yet) produced an S3a version of Todo, and Pelican Software does not intend to continue with any further development of the S3 version of Notepad.

The release of the 3a introduced a completely new built-in AGENDA package which included many features only previously available in the add-on to-do list managers. AGENDA is very powerful: having up to 99 to-do lists, each containing customisable lists, 'do-by' dates, alarms, attached notes, etc. This presented a very hard act to follow for the third party developers. Pelican Software obviously thought about the problem for some time because the first version of Notepad for the 3a was not released until March 1995, some 18 months after the 3a first became available.

What is Notepad?

The best starting point for a description of Notepad is from the author's own documentation; *"Notepad is a simple program that lets you take notes. Some notes will have alarms, some will be linked to other notes. Some will have due dates. Some will be linked to application files like Word, or the Spreadsheet. That's all there is to it. There are various parts of the program that are there to take care of each of these options. For example, since Notepad handles due dates, it needs a way to display a calendar of due dates. It does this in the project viewer... ...Since Notepad lets you attach alarms to each note, it needs a way to handle these alarms. The Server application does this. Since Notepad needs to be able to link to application files, like Word, there are various parts of the program that deal with linking"*

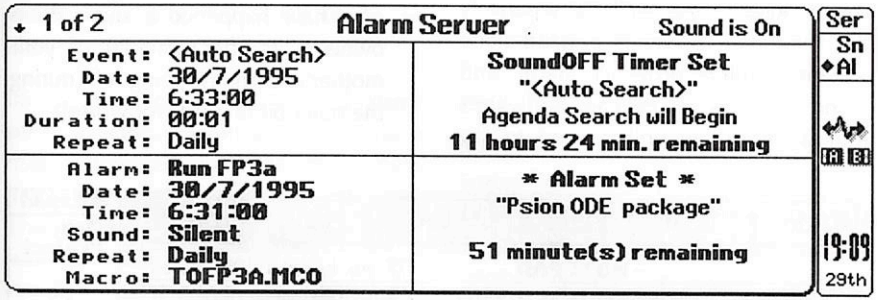
The first thing to note from this description is that Notepad is a modular program. You are not forced into using all that is provided, though the package is at its most powerful if you do. Taking each aspect of Notepad in turn:

The Notes editor

This allows a 'Note' (basically a to-do entry) to be entered rapidly and efficiently. Notes can be up to 255 characters in length, and if you want to take a longer note then you can link directly to a WORD document in a single key press. The notes editor itself has lots of nice little features such as the ability to include diallable fields, 'evaluated' (calculated) fields, or the current date and time. One thing not included is the ability to split text over several lines. Pressing 'Enter' terminates the entry of the note, exactly like Psion's AGENDA program.

Each individual note in a list can be 'expanded' to open another complete list of notes, as well as being linked to a WORD, DATA, or SHEET file. The tree of links is navigated with the cursor keys and this hierarchical approach is the key difference between to-do lists in AGENDA and Notepad. The lists of to-do items in AGENDA are not related, whereas the notes within Notepad can be 'nested' in a tree like, or DOS-directory-like structure.

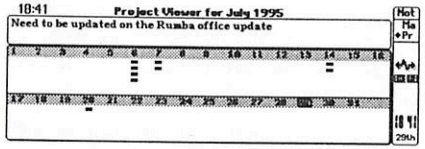
The hierarchy of notes combined with the linking facility allows a note itself to act as an extended filename (up to 255 characters) for a linked file. This principle can be used such that all your Word, Data or Spreadsheet files can appear to have extended file names. At one level therefore, Notepad can be used as a 'super' File Manager, where all your files are accessed through these meaningful names. All the files can also be grouped functionally (e.g. by subject) rather than by file type.



The Alarm Server

The Project Viewer

Each note can have an optional start and/or due date, as well as a priority and an alarm. Therefore 'Project Viewer' is a view across all notes in chronological order by due date. This allows you to identify which notes and to-do's should have been completed by a particular date. From a particular item in Project view, you can easily switch back to look at the original notepad.

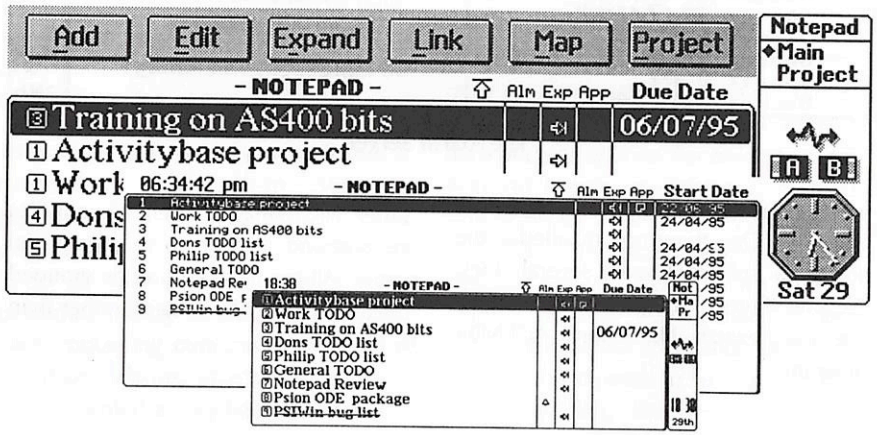


Project view, showing due dates

Server

This package is also available separately from Notepad. Server is a stand-alone program which provides alarm and sound services to Pelican Software's applications. I am embarrassed to say that I once wrote to the author and asked why he went to all the trouble of writing his own alarm server; 'what was wrong with the Psion offering' I said. I now eat my words:

- The key difference is that an active alarm does NOT lock up the system until it's cleared. This means that you are free to use other applications while retaining an alarm page (or snoozing alarm).
- Server has better alarm repeat options, allowing multiple daily or hourly repeats, easy re-scheduling of an alarm to the next day, programmable snooze function and other features.
- Server has a mechanism to disable all alarms during important meetings or events. This embarrassing scenario must have happened to every Psion owner, with the reminder of your mother's birthday going off during the quiet bit of a film (or worse!)



- Server links with the freeware MACSYS macro program from Tom Dolbilin (reviewed in issue 3 of *Palmtop*), allowing automatic timed & repeated macros to be executed in the background.

What does it look like?

Many users like to personalise their software packages, and Pelican Software have done a great deal to make Notepad configurable. The views on the previous page give some idea of how the main screen can be configured to suit the individual.

How can I use Notepad?

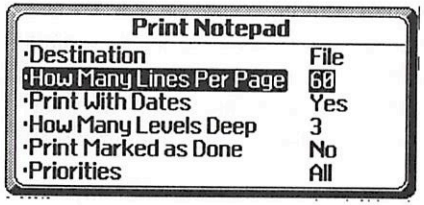
The best way to understand a package is to use it, so here is an explanation of how I use Notepad on a day-to-day basis:

06:30 every workday. Wake up to an alarm set from the Server package.

06:31 every day. The Notepad alarm server executes a silent alarm that runs a macro (created in MACSYS) which invokes Widget's Finance Pack software. This package needs to be invoked specifically every day to chug through my list of standing orders and direct debits and update my accounts. At least I will not have to wait for it to do this processing when I next come to use it at the checkout till!

06:33 every day. Notepad's Server opens my Agenda for the day, and identifies key events (marked with the '!' symbol as their first character), and prepares a list of events during which all sound on the Series 3a is disabled. I can ensure that I will not be interrupted during those important meetings by any forgotten reminders for birthdays or things to do.

08:30 at work, and with a cup of coffee in hand, I check the Project viewer, and remind myself what is due to be done today. I also despair at all the items I planned to complete earlier in the month but which are still outstanding.



Printing—look at all those options...

08:31 I finally identify something I *did* do on the previous day, so I press 'Psion -' to mark the item as complete, and automatically log the completion date.

09:00 monthly report reminder (last Friday of every month courtesy of Server). So I print the Completed log to a WORD file, and spend 10 minutes adding excuses for delays and highlighting all those unscheduled jobs that just appear. I then print it out and hand it in as complete.

11:15 review a current major project—print out the hierarchical Project-related to-do lists.

11:40 review the spreadsheet holding the project budget, which is linked to the

note 'CED Project budget 1995'. (It is so much clearer to have meaningful names for files).

13:00 report a networked printer queue problem to helpdesk: log the date/time of the call to a new note in Notepad with a single key press, then log the call number and a summary of the problem.

14:20 contact an external supplier (looking up and dialling the phone number directly from a Notepad related to the project). Discover that he is on holiday for 1 week, so log a reminder with an alarm for 1 week from today. Include a brief description of what I wanted to discuss, all in the same note.

15:30 Have a meeting with my boss, (Server has already disabled any audible reminders for the duration of the meeting). As part of the meeting he wants to arrange a demonstration with users next week, so I log this into a project related note, together with a due date. The note briefly covers the aims of the demo, and I copy this to my current Agenda file with a single key press, so my meeting time is allocated. I prefix the note with a, '!' character because I would not want any alarms to disturb this meeting.

16:10 During the meeting an alarm is displayed on screen, reminding me that I should be leaving early today. It doesn't make any sound, and doesn't prevent me from reading my Agenda file. It is just a constant quiet reminder that I shouldn't still be in this meeting.

Other Features

Well, the review so far has covered the basic functionality of Notepad. Here is a list of some of the extra features available:

Autofill: The facility to enter a user-defined string of text into a notepad entry with only two key presses. This complements the interface to MACSYS nicely, and allows system parameters (such as date and time) to be included in notes.

Plug-ins: The author documents the file structures used by Notepad and encourages users to build 'plug-ins': small OPL programs that provide additional functionality. These extra programs then appear to be integrated into the main application and can access the main notepad files directly. This allows Notepad to be expanded by users (at least those who familiar with OPL).

Fastnote: This is another 'mini-application' that allows you to enter notes without starting up the whole of Notepad. It is intended to provide extremely quick note entering, and let you sort them out at a later date by merging them into Notepad files. I find that the standard Notepad entry is so quick that I do not need to use this application.

Converter: You will only need this utility if you have used Notepad 4.6 on the Series 3. It converts Notepad 4.6 files into the correct format for the Series 3a version of the program.

Documentation: The documentation standards are very good. The author goes to a lot of effort to ensure that the principles of Notepad are clearly understood before detailing all the functionality of the package. Altogether there is over 160K of documentation in the downloaded .ZIP file. When running the online help is always available and most of it is now 'context sensitive'.

Summary

The Psion AGENDA package is an excellent to-do list manager and is provided free with every machine. Notepad however offers far more functionality, and thoughtfully integrates with existing S3a functionality to improve the overall usability of the Series 3a. Notepad offers an extra level of organisation to you, and if you think hierarchically, or are one of those people who uses OUTLINE mode in a word processor then look no further—Notepad is for you! If you do not need the extra functionality of Notepad, you simply *must* have a use for Server—available separately from Pelican.

Availability

Notepad is shareware that is not crippled in any way. You can use the full package for 21 days, and only after then does the software 'nag' you about registering, and lose some of its functionality. I thought this was a particularly intelligent way of approaching the problems associated with coaxing users to register shareware.

Mark Esposito / Pelican Software is very quick to respond to registrations and has been known to send registration details prior to receiving payment! The software itself is registered simply through the input of a special code number. You can register Notepad directly through Compuserve's GO SWREG facility, although Mark also accepts real money through the post. The price (in my opinion) is a bargain at $39 (US Dollars).

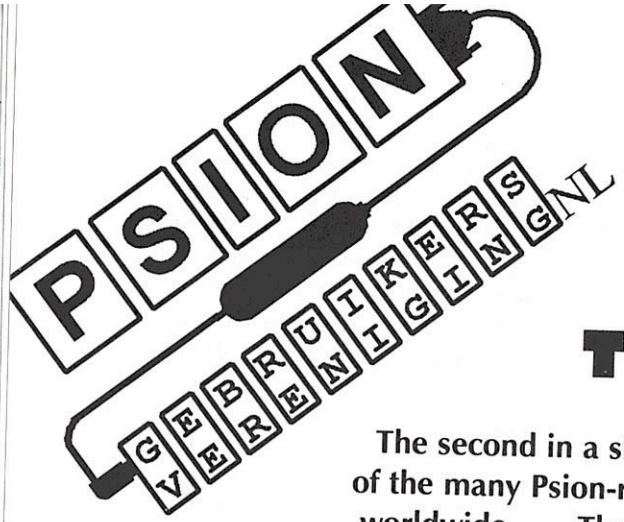
Server (Alarm Server and SoundOFF combined) costs $20 (SWREG id 3924) if you wish to register separately—or the details are set out automatically with the registration of Notepad.

Contact details:

Pelican Software
PO Box 741072
Houston, TX. 77274-1072
U.S.A.

Tel: +1 713 242-8928
Fax: +1 713 242-9573

E-mail: mespo@aol.com (preferred)
or mesposito@cix.compulink.co.uk
or 72662.3050@compuserve.com



Psion Around The World

The second in a short series looking at some of the many Psion-related groups and services worldwide — The 'Dutch Psion User Group'

The Dutch Psion User Group was officially founded in January 1995. It now has 750 members and is growing fast. So far we have organised a few user days with a few hundred attendees on each occasion. In November our first 'bar' meeting was held in Breda—an idea we picked up from the British!

The User Group runs its own BBS where members can find most of the internationally available shareware.

We decided not to issue a club magazine and are happy to see *Palmtop* serving as such for a number of our members. Instead we regularly issue so-called 'Psion Bulletins' on specific subjects, which we can update more easily. Furthermore we fill two pages in *Psion Nieuws*, the quarterly equivalent of *Psion User* that is issued by Psion Nederland BV, reaching several thousand Psion users. There users can find announcements and reviews of commercial software and shareware and, of course, all about (new) events and services offered by our User Group.

A major service we offer our members is the help desk which is staffed (and stuffed...) almost every evening. Through the help desk we noticed a strong demand for `one evening courses' on the basics of using the Series 3a. We have now started developing course material and expect the first courses to take place in the Spring of 1996.

We have recently started to simplify the registration of shareware for our members by passing on the currency-exchanged registration fee to the authors. Not so much to do with the Dutch being famous for their software piracy, but because the registration of applications written by foreign authors is difficult, time-consuming and often expensive for individuals.

Concluded on page 40...

"On The Net"

The latest gossip from the Information Superhighway

Pete Sipple takes a look at what's being said in the various Psion on-line conferences. In this Issue's 'On The Net' Pete looks at using the keyboard, the secrets beneath the case, flying with a Series 3, and reaction to two new software releases...

One of the most recent additions to the Psion family is 'Autoroute Express UK & Ireland'. Software giants Microsoft have recently taken over control of Autoroute from it's creators, NextBase, and released this traditionally PC-based application for the Series 3a. Initial reactions seem positive...

"Well I rushed out and bought it on Saturday - I never thought I would see the 'Microsoft Home' logo splashed across my Psion, but it bears none of the hallmarks of Microsoft programming otherwise - it crams an incredible amount of detail into a 1Mb ROM, and uses a mere 120-170Kb of RAM to run - compare this to the gargantuan DOS and Windows versions. Furthermore, it is customised for use on a handheld - e.g. you can update the tables with the current time on the clock or distance on your odometer - which I've not seen on the desktop versions. Special thought has been taken as to how to move the map cursor about efficiently and how to implement zooming, and the 'dot' on the map follows you (at any zoom level) as you scroll down the table view. Clever. All the road and town detail of the core Autoroute maps is there, though obviously not things like the extra village, waterways, points of interest overlays, etc."

(gsobala@stncroft.demon.co.uk)

"I got mine today. It certainly is a very polished piece of software and tempting to buy for Psion owners just to see what it is like. But the novelty value wears off rather soon. If the sales are good (especially considering there is a US edition as well), I wonder if Microsoft will release anything else for the Psion?"

(binesh@cix.compulink,co.uk)

"As I understand it Autoroute is actually a Psion product - it's just that Microsoft own Autoroute, hence they slap their badge on it. The badge is the only involvement. Feel free to correct me though."

(millar@cix.compulink.co.uk)

"It's the other way round. It's entirely a Microsoft (/NextBase) development. I don't know who's printing the boxes, doing the Marketing, etc. I expect we're both involved in that (in the UK at least). The box, while retaining the style of the 'Microsoft at Home ' range, certainly has some 3a-style in it too. It's quite nice to have Microsoft developing for our platform."

(Nick @Psion)

"I would also like to know the intended upgrade route. If I buy a paper map I have to replace it after a few years because a few important roads have changed. What about Autoroute? Will they do upgrades, or road alteration patches? Why can't we have a simple edit facility to add and change roads? This way we can add in that all important short cut through the country lanes - where we really need the directions!"

(krb@ecs.soton.ac.uk)

"One of the problems of ROM-based software is that it's very expensive to upgrade, so I guess Autoroute will stay the same for quite a while. And conversely that's the beauty of shareware, User FRED asks for a feature, and the author says "That's tricky, it'll take a while - can't do it until at least Thursday!"

(slitchfield@cix.compulink.co.uk)

Another program that has recently made the transition from desktop to palmtop is Act!, by Symantec...

"When will ACT! be on sale for the Psion in the UK? How different is it from the PC and Mac versions? Will it be supplied on PC disk or SSD?"

(100543.635@compuserve.com)

"It is available now in the UK. It costs just under £100. It has most of the features of the Windows version and can be obtained on disk or SSD. I prefer disk, and the install program which works with the 3Link cable is good. There are still some problems with the software. I spoke to Symantec technical support yesterday, and these are being worked on—no date yet for completion. I would hold off for a couple of months. Potentially, however, it looks excellent."

(100016.3002@compuserve.com)

"It is well worth the money. You can manage all your contacts, have a graphical overview of your meetings, calls, schedules. Have quick access to the history of each contact and a very smooth way to build reports from your database. One thing. You can't use more than 1500 entries in one database."

(100022.1371@compuserve.com)

Curiosity killed the warranty?

"Will someone whose warranty has expired please remove the little sticker under the door of drive A and tell me what the hell's under there? Is it an 'upgrade to 2Mb ' secret button, or just a way of getting out of a few warranty payments because of the insatiable curiosity of people? I feel like Pandora - the temptation is overwhelming me!"

(ejwild@p-90.demon.co.uk)

"It is an ordinary screw. However, if you undo the screw, the Psion genie will appear and grant you three wishes!!"

(denniss@logica.co.uk)

"Will someone whose warranty has expired please remove the little sticker under the door of drive A and tell me what the hell's under there?"

"Don't believe a word of it... A couple of years ago my Series 3 decided not to work just as a Bank Holiday came up. I frantically phoned all the Psion phone numbers I had, but it was Friday late afternoon and of course no-one was interested until after the holiday. When I shook the unit, I could hear something rattling around inside...so I went ahead and took off the little sticker and tried to open the unit—unsuccessfully. Upon taking the unit into Psion's repair centre I told them that it was under warranty. 'Oh no, because you have removed the sticker, the warranty is void. ' From bitter experience, and no fault of my own (in terms of the thing going wrong), I now have the knowledge of what is behind the little sticker—it's A REALLY HARD TIME FROM PSION..."

(alex@alexc.demon.co.uk)

"I looked at the sticker closely and it really does say 'Warranty void if removed'. It does not say 'Warranty void if removed unless you are in a bit of a fix in which case it's OK '. I really think you are being unfair here. Can the manufacturer really be held responsible if a customer takes a machine apart and, maybe, damages it while trying to fix it with the best of intentions. I'm not suggesting this is what you did, but the sticker (which could not be worded more clearly) is the only way we have of knowing for sure that the machine has not been tampered with (and by association, the problem is

almost certainly our fault) and so is covered by the warranty."

(alim@psioninc.com)

One contributor had taken a Series 3 for a test drive. He couldn't quite get to grips with it...

"I tested a Psion and felt like an elephant riding a bicycle—how do you all type with speed and accuracy? Any 10 finger typists?"

(chrisris@aol.com)

"I tested a Psion and felt like an elephant riding a bicycle"

"It depends—if I don't have a surface to rest it on then I use my thumbs, and I can take down name and address details into DATA, or make AGENDA entries faster than I ever could with a paper filofax. If I have a surface, then I use thumbs and the first three fingers of both hands. I don't type 'Pitman' style—I tend to type common letter sequences with set sequences of finger movements. I can type a full dictation of a lecture in real time."

(robin@varuna.demon.co.uk)

"I wish I could touch type, BUT I do well enough and I'm about as fast on my Psion as I am on big keyboards. I do 'thumb type' when there is no space or if I'm standing up, but If I'm sitting down I just slap it on my lap and type properly. Even I was amazed at what I could do with it."

(iau@lon.neste.com)

"Exactly the way I type, too. Many people think I'm playing a heck of a video game when they see me typing really fast."

(mtr@addix.swb.de)

"On occasion I type with my thumbs, for if I use my fingers it looks like I've typed with my elbows!"

(rks@annex.com)

The heading 'Psion ate my transit ticket!' looked like it should belong on the first page of a tabloid newspaper rather than a discussion forum, but this message highlighted a possible danger to Psion users...

"The other day, I made the mistake of placing my transit ticket (which has a magnetic bar strip on it) in the same jacket pocket as my Psion. When I tried to use the ticket it didn't work! I guess the speaker in the Psion de-magnetised my ticket. I'll have to be very careful using my Psion around my credit cards!"

(tristtom@aol.com)

"Yes, I had the same experience with a parking garage ticket here in Amsterdam. It took some time to persuade them to let me out... It really does de-magnetise everything in no time..."

(brz@xs4all.nl)

"Same goes with diskettes. I have destroyed quite a few floppy disks by carrying them next to my Psion."

(win@addix.swb.de)

"I don't know about the English user manual, but the German one has a big warning on the first page: 'NOTE - It is possible that the Psion may damage data on magnetic storage devices due to the built in (magnetic) speaker. For this reason it is not recommended to carry Credit cards and similar devices that store data on a magnetic strip in the same pocket as the Psion.' Sorry for the weak translation."

(100554.3662@compuserve.com)

Wakey Wakey! The Series 3 is great for warning of upcoming appointments, but does it beat an alarm clock?...

"I overslept this morning for the umpteenth time because I turned the sound off on my 3a during a meeting yesterday. Is there any way to automatically turn the sound back on at midnight?"

(houttuin@unisource.ch)

"Check out SERVER from Pelican software. It enables both alarms to be managed more effectively (they shut up after a while and repeat, can be snoozed, etc.) and it turns sound on/off. Used to be called SOUNDOFF I think."

(steve@sbil.co.uk)

"I am amazed at the number of people who accelerate their battery drain by using their Psion as an alarm clock, not to mention having to fumble around in the dark to open the case and find the escape key when it goes off. Surely the best device to wake you up in the morning is an alarm clock?"

(boys@atuk.aspentec.com)

"I have yet to find a regular alarm clock that only wakes me up on workdays (Mon-Fri) without having to be enabled/disabled the night before. The Psion handles that just fine."

(ej@id.dtu.dk)

One contributor to the CompuServe forum posted a message informing us that, for safety reasons, they had been instructed not to use their Series 3 during a transatlantic flight. It would seem that some airlines have a firm policy on the use of portable computers...

"Indeed they do, and some even go so far as to ban all electronic devices such as laptops and CD players entirely! Last flight I was on between London and Toronto we weren't allowed to use these

devices. However, figuring my 3a could hardly be the cause of heavy RF interference I carried on using my 3a during the flight and never got any complaints."

(103204.2476@compuserve.com)

"I don't want to sound sanctimonious, but that sounds pretty dumb to me. If the crew say not to use electronic devices on a plane, then you should switch them off. Whatever risks you want to take with your own life, you have no right to endanger the lives of others."

(100015.3421@compuserve.com)

"The current situation is that most airlines ban all electronics during take-off and landing, but permit most devices during cruising. The only ones which they should ban throughout a flight are CD players and computers with CD-ROM drives, and any form of portable telephone or radio transmitter. Some airlines, because of insurance issues, ignorance, or whatever, seem to be extending the ban on use during cruising. However irrational this may be, I think you should follow the ban as instructed, and complain to the airline afterwards, rather than deliberately ignore it."

(70734.120@compuserve.com)

"I'm an Air France pilot. Concerning the use of electronics devices in flight I can tell you the following: Due to reported incidents, the ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organisation) which is only a 'consulting ' organisation has given the recommendation of not using any electronics device during take-off and landing. I think that for insurance reason some airlines have extended this to the whole flight. Anyway I use my Psion in the cockpit and I've never seen any interference problem. However you must understand the fact that if pilots are using an electronic device, it is not an excuse for passengers using them despite the crew recommendations. Why? Simply because if by using my Psion I detect interference, I can immediately switch it off. The delay between the detection of a problem and the switch off action performed by the passenger might be too long... so briefly: Airlines do not know which devices will or will not cause interference. Airlines follow the ICAO recommendation of prohibiting use of electronics during take off and landing."

(100617.3675@compuserve.com)

For those new to Palmtop, Psion related discussions take place in the comp.sys.psion Usenet newsgroup, as well as the Psion conference on CiX, and the Palmtop A forum on CompuServe.

Shareware can be downloaded from CompuServe and CiX conferences, as well as the two Internet FTP sites:

ftp://src.doc.ic.ac.uk/packages/psion/icdoc/

ftp://ftp.frontiernet.com/pub/psion/

In the next issue, I'll take a look at what's available on the Internet for those with WWW (World Wide Web) access - Pete.

A Case for the Defence

...The defence of your Psion, that is. The concluding part of our feature on cases, wallets and holsters for your Series 3.

By Steve Clack

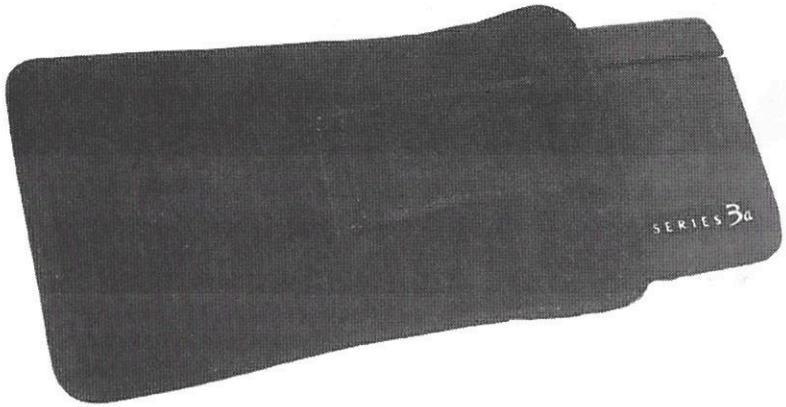
Series 3 Sleeve/Holster Leather case

Moving to the other end of the sophistication spectrum from the esoteric cases reviewed in the last issue we have the simple and original sleeve case. I've owned and used one of these for some time now, and value its convenience and minimal size. It is nothing more than two pieces of leather sewn together to form a snug fitting 'envelope', with a simple belt loop sewn onto one side.

I had never tried the belt loop until I wrote this review, but it actually works very well. I confess to feeling a little too self-conscious to walk around 'packing' a 3a on my waist, but for someone needing constant access to the machine and wanting to keep both hands (and all pockets) free this is a good idea. I tried jumping up and down for all I was worth, and managed to convince myself that the computer couldn't possibly jump out of the case while it was attached to the belt loop.

A simple but neat case then, offering probably the least protection of the group, but being the only one to fit reasonably comfortably into a jacket, suit or jeans pocket.

Having seen three or four of these over the past months, I've noticed that the finish of the leather seems to vary substantially from one case to another, ranging from various leather finishes to an almost suede-like feel. Potential buyers should be aware of this if buying the case by mail order.



The simple sleeve case—still the most neat and compact choice

InfoBOX

The Sleeve case is produced by Systemslink Two Ltd, and is available directly from them, or from most Psion dealers at £13.95 plus VAT. The part number is 031004.

Systemslink Two Ltd:

Tel: +44 (0)1234 711220

Series 3 Thin Leather case

Not much bulkier than the sleeve case, this looks very much like an undersized paper-based personal organiser when closed. Like most leather' 'filofax' binders it is held in the closed position by a small leather loop with a stud fastener. Your Psion fits inside a large open-sided pocket, which is covered by the spine of the case when closed to prevent the computer from falling out.

This model barely offers any more protection than the simple sleeve case, but looks beautifully stylish and adds a 160 x 70mm document pocket alongside the computer, plus three SSD slots on the opposite side. In common with almost every case with slots for SSD storage the slots are rather tight, and when closed the additional bulk tends to pull the case out of shape a bit. This one is better than most though, and it is made from the most supple and best quality leather of all those reviewed in this group.

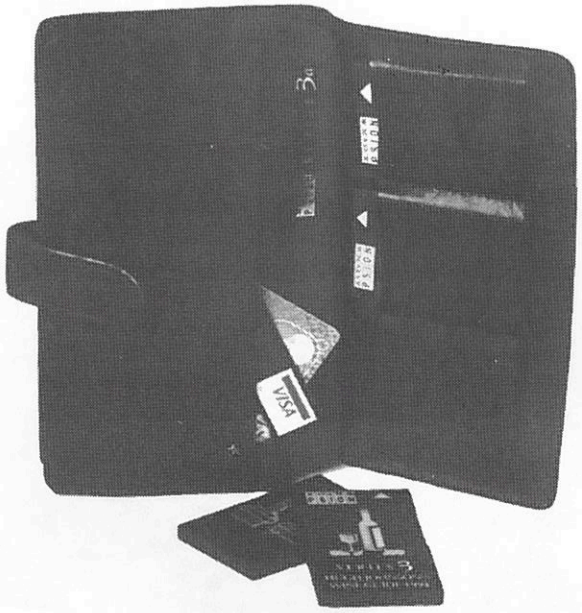
I liked the quality and feel of this case so much that for the past month or so I have forsaken my trusty sleeve case in favour of this one. It feels less comfortable in a jacket pocket due to the extra bulk and it takes longer to pull my 3a out ready for use, but the leather just feels (and smells) so good that it begs to be used. My new favourite.

InfoBOX

The Thin Leather case is produced by Systemslink Two Ltd, and is available directly from them, or from most Psion dealers at £24.95 plus VAT. The part number is 031025.

Series 3 Executive Leather case

Made by the same manufacturer, this is basically a heavy duty version of the thin leather case. The machine sits in the same kind of wide pocket (though without the document pocket) and the opposite inside face of the case has a 150mm x 80mm document pocket and two slits in the leather into which SSDs can be slotted. Sadly these are extremely



The thin leather case—supple and sexy

tight, and with SSDs in place the case doesn't close comfortably. Leather will of course 'give' with use, but I still felt the slots to be poorly designed, and considering that this case has such a quality feel it seemed a shame to pull it all out of shape by squeezing SSDs into it.

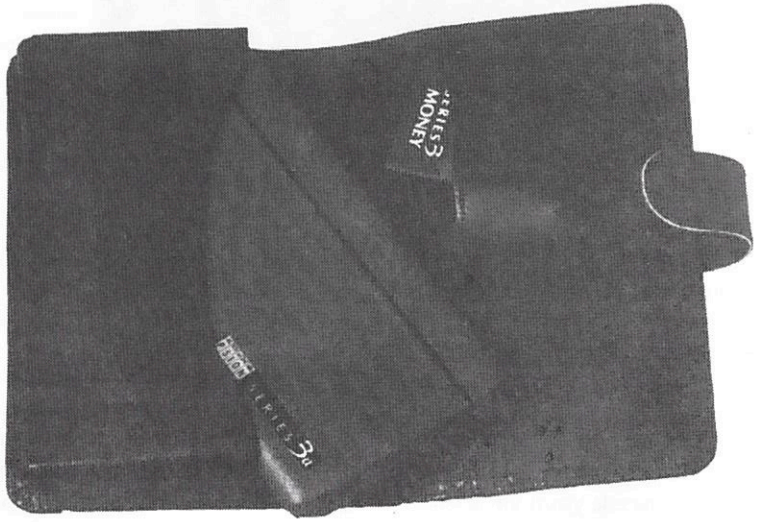
Overall this case offers much more protection than the previous two as the leather is much thicker, and it looks stylish inside a briefcase, handbag or if carried in the hand. All the Systemslink cases can also have gold monogram letters imprinted onto them by filling out the enclosed card and returning it with the case to the manufacturer (UK only) for £3.95.

InfoBOX

The Executive Leather case is produced by Systemslink Two Ltd, and is available directly from them, or from most Psion dealers at £24.95 plus VAT. The part number is 031005.

Series 3 Zipped Leather case

Allowing fast access to your Psion coupled with maximum protection, this is like a smaller version of the New World Technologies cases reviewed in the last issue. Opening the three-sided zipper reveals a flat surface on one side with two Velcro™ pads. You stick one side of each



The Executive case—thick and solid

pad permanently to the back of your Series 3, and the other side stays permanently in place, being sewn into the inside face of the case. You can thus unzip it, flip open your computer, and use it while still inside and protected.

Many people may prefer this approach rather than having to pull the Psion right out of the case every time it is used, and it's certainly no bulkier than the Executive case.

The opposite side of the case has two SSD slots, and because you can zip it fully closed it is reasonable to stuff a few thin documents into it too. The sample copy was more of a suede finish than leather, but of good quality and with a nice robust zipper. This is a case with many points in its favour.

The Zipped case—well worth consideration

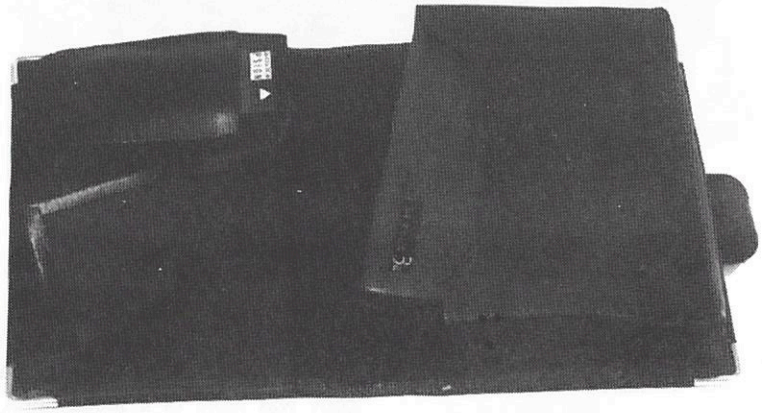
InfoBOX

The Zipped Leather case is produced by Systemslink Two Ltd, and is available directly from them, or from most Psion dealers at £24.95 plus VAT. The part number is 031023.

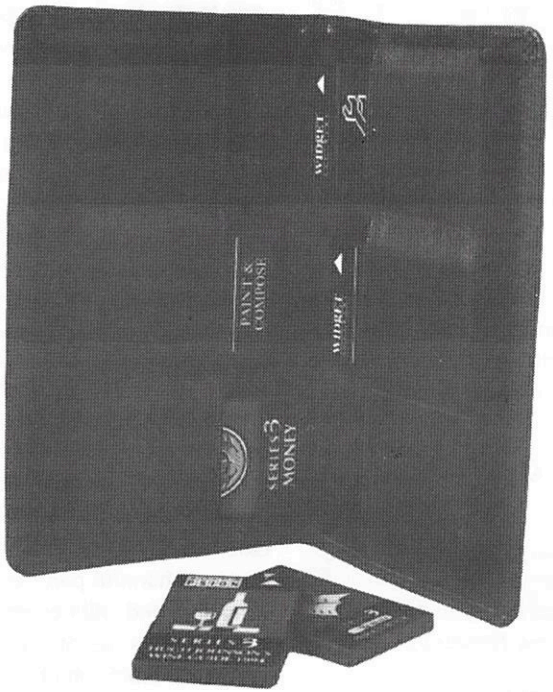
Targus Deluxe Executive case

Made by the major computer case manufacturer, Targus, this is externally similar to the Systemslink Executive case. It is a little bigger in all directions, but has the same loop and stud fastening and an especially generous leather pouch for the Series 3. The Targus offering is made from thick board-backed leather like the Systemslink Executive case, with a small leather patch stitched to the front with the Targus logo embossed onto it. The four open corners are fitted with little brass tabs to protect them from scuffing. Whereas I don't personally find these attractive this is purely a matter of taste, and they certainly protect the leather from becoming dog-eared with time, and I'm sure many people find that they add to the appearance.

Targus make cases for almost every type of portable computer available, and have taken a slightly more thoughtful approach than Systemslink when it comes to the inclusion of SSDs. The inside face opposite the computer pocket sports a fold-out flap with three generously sized SSD slots, plus three more (slightly tighter this time) under the flap. The obligatory document pouch is included as always, but again this is not tight, unlike some of the Systemslink cases. The whole 'folder' is a little difficult



Generous and roomy—the Targus Deluxe Exec'



Targus SSD case—holds 6 SSDs

to close with all six SSDs in place, but closes perfectly with just three.

This is another good mid-sized case, and should be compared directly against the Systemslink Executive case if you are looking for one in this range. Far too big for any reasonable sized pocket, but fine for a briefcase or handbag.

InfoBOX

The Targus Deluxe Executive case is available from most Psion dealers at around £20 plus VAT. Clove Technology are currently offering it to *Palmtop* readers at £12 + VAT for a limited period.

Contact Clove Technology on:

+44 (0)1202 302796

Targus SSD case

Not a Series 3/3a case at all this time, but the same size as a large format money wallet, this gives comfortable storage for six SSDs or PCMCIA cards held in two rows. It has nice full-length velcro strips to keep the two halves closed safely together. It's a pity that it won't hold anything else though—as it has no document pockets, pen loops or the like. Useful for anyone who insists on carrying such a huge quantity of solid state disks around with them, but certainly of little use for the average user.

InfoBOX

The Targus SSD case is available from most Psion dealers at around £15 plus VAT.

Conclusion

The range of cases reviewed over the past two issues is wide enough to include something for almost every type of user. The individual should judge exactly what balance between portability, accessibility, storage and protection is required for their own pattern of use.

And don't forget that a case doesn't have to be custom built for your Series 3 in order to fulfil its job. If you want something cheaper then try looking around in camera shops—these usually have suitably sized nylon cases for around £3-5. An oversized compact camera case will probably be at least as well padded as most of the cases reviewed here, and you can stuff all of the extra available space with SSDs, the contents of your wallet, glasses, passport, half-eaten bars of chocolate and all the other detritus you normally like to carry around with you. The beautifully sized SSD pockets offered in many of the cases reviewed give precious little advantage over simply stuffing them into a shirt pocket. Solid state disks are inherently very robust, and unless you plan to take them to the beach with you they are probably almost indestructible.

Whatever you choose though, don't even consider managing without a case altogether. Apart from the protection offered by even the most rudimentary case, a case-less 3/3a will tend to suffer from dust and harmful particles creeping into its casing, and will become progressively more untidy as it accumulates the inevitable knocks and bumps of everyday use.

The case you choose for your Psion can either be an expensive and stylish fashion accessory or just something to absorb the knocks of everyday use. What particular mix of features you choose will depend upon your own personal preferences.

(Photographs by Jeff Coles)

Writing Shareware - a guide for software authors

Shareware author and distributor *Steve Litchfield* gives some pointers on how to market your work for maximum success

The shareware world is a curious one, being open to absolutely anyone with the necessary programming talent. Whereas commercial software can be very expensive to produce because of the costs of distributing on Flash SSD and so on, any one person can write a freeware or shareware program, submit it to the *3-Lib* shareware library or upload it to a bulletin board, and you're in business. No marketing or media costs—just wait for the feedback, the money, or both!

Well, that's the theory. In practice it helps to think about what you actually want to achieve with the program. The chances are that your program falls into one of two categories: either it's something you wrote for yourself and you're not really interested in making money out of it, you just want to make your efforts available to others in case they find it useful; or it's a fairly major program which you've put a lot of work into and would like to attract serious shareware registrations. If the former, then just make your program freeware: if the latter, then make it shareware with a reasonable registration fee. That may sound simplistic, but in most cases trying to do something in between the two just doesn't work.

For example, my own TRIVIA program was something I did for myself and wanted to make freely available, whereas *Mapper-3a* was written as a major application as part of my now going 'full-time' in the Psion arena and as such was released as shareware, with proceeds going to pay my mortgage!

So, having completed the bulk of your program and having decided that it is going to be shareware, how exactly should you proceed? I've put together a series of DOs and DON'Ts which will hopefully help you to write shareware that will not only benefit those enjoying your work but also bring in some hard cash as well.

DO make your application as fully working as possible: don't cripple it to the point where the user either doesn't bother to install it or deletes it soon after due to frustration.

DO keep *something* back for registered users. Removal of the nag screen is obvious, but maybe something else small as well—as an extra incentive. Try to pick a feature that the user would only need after using your program for a while.

DON'T over-nag. Nag screens shouldn't be intrusive, i.e. once at the start and end of running the program is enough. If the person uses your program regularly they're going to see it often enough anyway.

DON'T put any kind of time-lock on the program: this really annoys most people, and an annoyed person is not going to feel inclined to send you any money. Time-locking a program also annoys software librarians (like myself, at *3-Lib*), and as an author you'll want to stay on our good side.

DO ensure that registration can be done by typing in a simple code, and that the user will not have to re-install the program. Make the process as quick and easy as possible.

DO try to be flexible in how you accept registrations: people don't like having to convert their own currency in order to pay for a piece of software.

DO use CompuServe's GO SWREG scheme if you are a CompuServe user. it allows people to register your software with a click of a mouse button and have the money automatically transferred from their CompuServe account and paid to you.

DON'T charge too much *or* too little for your application. Around £6 is a sensible minimum for a small program and £20 about the maximum for an all-singing all-dancing mega-application. Someone recently submitted a program to 3-Lib with a registration fee of only £1. Very few people would go to the trouble of sending in such a small sum of money.

DON'T ask for registration fees to be sent to a charity. While very commendable, this scheme rarely works in practice.

DO test your program thoroughly, use beta testers, etc. Once you've issued it to the world you can never adequately recall it, and however many bug-fixes you upload at a later date there'll always be people using the imperfect version and cursing your name for eternity.

DO make sure that your program is generally useful before expecting massive sales. A scuba diving pressure calculator, for example, would be best off as a freeware program, because it's only ever going to get a handful of people interested in it.

DO make sure that your documentation files are as clear as possible. Remember that many users will be novices and not very computer-literate. e.g. 'I've copied the ZIP file onto my Psion under WORD but nothing's happened yet'. Write your documentation to help novices as much as you can.

DO make sure that your program is distributed as widely as humanly possible: upload it everywhere in sight in the Psion world. Especially send it in to the *3-Lib* library, because I then upload it (as part of a regular service) to many of the main user groups and bulletin boards, etc. Make a note of where you send it in case you have to re-upload any bug fixes.

DO protect your program from reverse translation, by using OPLPROT, AKA or any of the other protection utilities available. This probably warrants an article in its own right, so watch this space...

DO be prepared to take time to respond to user wish-lists, fix any bugs and generally maintain and support the program.

There are probably other pearls of wisdom of your own that you'll want to contribute, so send them in to *Palmtop* for the rest of us to learn from! Happy authoring!

Steve Litchfield

You can find more details of Steve Litchfield's *3-Lib* shareware library on page 9 of this issue-Ed.

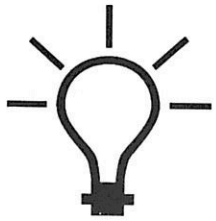
And finally...

It is worth mentioning to all software authors out there in *Palmtop* land that it is easier to evaluate and load shareware if the text file with the program is in plain ASCII text. Many programs come with RTF or Psion WORD format documents which mean loading into the appropriate machine before even the instructions for loading can be seen.

Obviously it is even better to provide documentation in ASCII format *and* others such as .WRD, RTF and Microsoft Word, but the ASCII format should always be included too.

Francis Creese - SYSOP DATALINK BBS

Hints & Tips



More useful suggestions to squeeze that last little bit of functionality out of your beloved Psion...

Find and Replace

Tired of having no 'Find and Replace' function in the built-in DATA application? Then use the OPL program editor instead. Remember that the OPL program editor is also a very good ASCII (plain text) editor as well. I used the following technique to change all my telephone numbers following Phoneday, although it could be used for many purposes.

By using the 'Save as' (Psion-A) option under DATA it is possible to save the database as a delimited text file. Set 'Save as' to TEXT and supply a suitable delimiter. I suggest using a semicolon, but ensure that whatever character you use is not used anywhere within the data file itself, otherwise these will be taken as indicating the start of new field!

Once saved, select the file for editing under the OPL Program Editor. The editor can then be used for standard editing, and using the 'Replace' (Psion-R) function to make multiple changes. During Phoneday I changed ';01' to ';011', ';02' to' ;012', ';03' to ';013', etc.

Once complete I suggest the creation of a new DATA file until you are happy with the changes that have taken place, at which point the new file can be renamed and the old one deleted.

The changed TEXT file can be converted back to the new DATA file by using 'Merge in' (Psion-M) using similar options to the 'Save as' previously, setting the file type to TEXT and the originally selected delimiter character.

Paul Morgan
Rayleigh, Essex.

Removing icons

Many of *Palmtop*'s readers will be aware that there's a maximum limit of 50 installed applications (icons) on the 3a. This can be overcome by using shareware/freeware programs such as XFile and John Boyce's JBLaunch, however, for me there is a far more elegant method. I removed the TIME, WORLD & CALC applications using the 'Psion-/' key combination. TIME will automatically appear under the RunImg icon and can still be accessed using the button bar icon above the keyboard: this will effectively allow you to run one extra application. I then wrote some very basic macros to launch the CALC & WORLD applications using Tom Dolbilin's MACSYS macro application **(as reviewed in issue 3 of *Palmtop - Ed.*)**:

```
Proc Macro:
Useapp:("system")
RunApppC("world",
"loc::m:\wld\world.wld")
Endp

Proc macro
Useapp ("system")
RunAppC:("calc","calc.app")
Endp
```

I then installed these new macros after translation & assigned Control-W & Control-C hot keys to the macros. With Macsys running in the background I can launch these applications at any time, even though they aren't installed on the system screen. By doing this, I have obviously freed another two slots for further applications. As before, when running, these applications can be accessed by the button bar keys. Taken to extremes, all but one icon/application could, in theory, be removed from the system screen & Macsys macros could be used to launch & access them.

Nigel Wright
Darlington, County Durham

And some Odds and Ends...

1. I only recently discovered by accident that you can switch the Series 3 on by pressing any one of the built-in 'Soft keys' located between the keyboard and the screen.
2. I use the password system on start up but did find having to keep typing in my code a bit of a pain . I have also read some horror stories of people forgetting it . So I now use a single key one (it could be a symbol ,not just a letter), on the basis that anyone trying to open it if lost etc . would not know how many letters the word had anyway.

Geoff Harrop
Oundle, Cambridgeshire

Competition

Paul Morgan wins a copy of Psion's *SoundMaster* software for his 'Find and Replace' tip.

A free leather Psion case will go to the best contribution to the *next* Hints & Tips. Case supplied courtesy of Systemslink Two Ltd.

Please send in your submissions within four weeks of receiving this issue to ensure their inclusion in the competition.

Next Issue...

Planned for issue 6:

- Calculators for the 3a. There is more to be had than the built-in CALC software...
- 8 Megabyte flash disks anyone? They're not made by Psion, but they're here...
- Psion's new SMS link. What's it all about?
- How to install shareware onto your machine. Pete Sipple removes the mystique once and for all.
- The first of a new regular feature—'Programming Questions', chaired by Rick Andrews.
- The Psion of the future. Andrew Baldwin takes a hypothetical look at some possible future developments in the palmtop arena.
- All this PLUS the usual features and more...